

Dessalegn Rahmato



THE PEASANT AND THE STATE
Studies in Agrarian Change in Ethiopia 1950s-2000s

Addis Ababa University Press



To my good friend
Zemedu

With my best wishes .

Dessalegn

28 August 2009

THE PEASANT AND THE STATE

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Dessalegn Rahmato

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Notes

The administrative division of the country has changed several times in the last fifty years. During the imperial regime, the country was divided into three administrative units: province, *auraja* (sub-province), and *woreda* (district). The *mikit woreda* (sub-district) was in use in the 1950s and 1960s but was abolished later. The Derg retained the three-tier system but introduced further complications in 1986. Provinces were split into two, and so-called "autonomous regions" were created. These "regions", which included Tigrai, Afar and Ogaden, were given limited rights of internal self-rule. Until this date, and all through the imperial period, Wollo, for example, was one province with twelve *aurajas*. From 1986, it was split into two provinces, called North and South Wollo.

The present government has redrawn the country's administrative map along ethnic lines, and changed the boundaries of former units. The country now is divided into nine ethnic-based politico-administrative units called *Killils*, each one of which is further divided into *Zones* and *woredas*. Below the *woreda* is the *kebele*, which is now formally the lowest administrative unit. In a way, the present *kebele* marks the return of

the *mikist woreda* but in a different guise. The *Zone* is in many instances approximately the same as the province during the Derg in post-1986 period or earlier, but the *awraja* has been abolished. The term *Killil* is rendered as *Region* in English in official documents but I prefer the Amharic term because it is less confusing.

The spelling of Ethiopian place and personal names is not standardized and the same name may appear under different spellings. Thus, for example, Wollo may also appear as Wello, Welo, or Wallo. I have retained older spellings where these are widely used, otherwise I have followed my own rules.

References are given at the end of each essay. Following customary practice, Ethiopian authors are listed alphabetically by their *first* name

A brief note on the meaning of the terms "agrarian" and "agriculture/agricultural" as used in this work. The word "agricultural" (or "agriculture") refers to the *cultivation* of the soil, the "technicalities of farming" in Marc Bloch's words, and embraces such activities as land and livestock management, cropping practices, and labor techniques. "Agrarian" on the other hand refers to the *land* and the social, economic and ownership institutions pertaining to it. It includes rights to land, class and power relations, and structures of production and appropriation. Thus, the latter term is much broader than the former.

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I would like to thank my friend Yeraswork Admassie who read parts of the book in draft and whose constructive criticism was very valuable.

Addis Ababa, 2008

Acronyms

AAA: Addis Anteneh and Associates	AIDB: Agricultural and Industrial Bank
AMC: Agricultural Marketing Corporation	ANRS: Amhara National Regional State
Bal: Balambaras	CADU: Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit
CBO: Community-Based Organization	CSO: Central Statistical Office
DA: Development Agent	Dej: Dejazmach
EC: Ethiopian Calendar	EDU: Ethiopian Democratic Union
EHRCO: Ethiopian Human Rights Council	EPID: Extension and Project Implementation Department (of MoA)
EPLF: Eritrean People's Liberation Front	EPRP: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
EWLA: Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association	FAO: Food and Agricultural Organization
FDRE: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	Fit: Fitawrari
GC: Gregorian Calendar	GPS: Geographical Positioning System
Graz: Grazmach	Ha.: Hectare
IDA: International Development Association (of World Bank)	IECAMA: Imperial Ethiopian College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts (Alemaya Agricultural College)
IEG: Imperial Ethiopian Government	IIED: International Institute of Environment and Development
ILCA: International Livestock Centre for Africa (Addis Ababa)	ILO: International Labour Office
Kegn: Kegnazmach	LAC: Land Administration Committee
MCB: Ministry of Capacity Building	MLRA: Ministry of Land Reform and Administration
MoA: Ministry of Agriculture	MOFED: Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
Mol: Ministry of Interior	MPP: Minimum Package Programme
MT: Metric Tons	NCO: Non-Commissioned Officer
NGO: Non-Government Organization	OA: Observation Area (of MPP)
ONRS: Oromia National Regional State	PA: Peasant Association
PANE: Poverty Action Network Ethiopia	PASDEP: Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty
PCO: Planning Commission Office	PLHA: People Living with HIV/AIDS
RRC: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission	SDPRP: Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program
Sida: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency	SNNPR(S): Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (State)
SRI: Stanford Research Institute (Menlo Park, California)	TNRS: Tigrai National Regional State
TPLF: Tigrai People's Liberation Front	UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
USAID: U.S. Agency for International Development	USDA: U.S. Department of Agriculture
USOM/E: U.S. Operations Mission to Ethiopia	WADU: Wollaita (formerly Wollamo) Agricultural Development Unit
WHO: World Health Organisation	

Introduction

This volume brings together a number of studies of mine on rural Ethiopia written at different times and for different occasions. I am publishing it at this time in the hope that it will contribute to the emerging debate on agrarian change in this country. The broad time frame for the work is the last half-century of modern Ethiopia, roughly from the 1950s to the beginning of the 2000s, a period which coincides politically with the imperial, Derg and EPRDF regimes. However, the work is not meant to be a chronological or comparative one, rather it is a work focusing on selected topics which I believe are important both in their own right as well as in terms of the broader theme in question. Over this half century much has changed in the country but much also remains the same. Similarly, while the three political regimes differ radically in a number of significant respects, they also have many things in common, particularly in their relations to the peasantry, their quest for a strong presence in the countryside, and, in some respects, in their approach to development management.

The field of agrarian studies attracted only a few intrepid souls during the imperial regime, and for the most part, academics and policy planners were reluctant to venture into the countryside. Several reasons have been given for the neglect of the subject, among which the paucity of reliable data, the bureaucratic obstacles put up by local officials to research work, and the physical hardships facing field workers have frequently been cited. The rural world did not attract many of the country's intellectuals of the generation of the 1960s and '70s because they saw it as tradition-bound and mired in poverty. The study of rural livelihoods and agrarian institutions did not inspire much interest and promised little reward. But this was to change with the outbreak of the Revolution. From the end of the 1970s, rural studies began to attract a new generation of researchers due in part to the radical reforms of the Revolution and of the influence of Marxist thought. New areas for inves-

tigation were opened up by the radical reforms of the Derg. Programs of land redistribution, agricultural socialization, grain requisitioning, resettlement and villagization were being implemented on a large scale and at a rapid pace in the 1980s, and the researcher was offered the rare opportunity of actually monitoring the progress of these programs. While the political environment was difficult and at times dangerous for independent thought and free dialogue, considerable research was undertaken and presented for debate in this period¹. It is worth noting that despite the imposition of a hard-line Stalinist state system and ideology, the Derg never managed to snuff out free inquiry, and, contrary to William Shack, who claimed that the Revolution had brought to an end social science research in Ethiopia, more independent research work was produced by Ethiopians at this time than during the previous regime. Unfortunately a good many of these works were never published, and are now "fugitive" documents, not easily accessible, nevertheless, as the reader will see from my references, I have benefited considerably from some of these works.

The volume contains a collection of critical essays some of them written a while back but many of them recently, and while a few were submitted for discussion in various public forums at the time of writing, most have not been available in published form, and hence not accessible to students and researchers. The work reflects my own choices of what is important and needs further investigation to obtain a better understanding of the agrarian history of this country in the last half century, however, I am well aware that the study is by no means complete, and that there are numerous and glaring gaps. My purpose is to stimulate informed debate and in the process to indicate how much work needs to be done before a serious attempt is made to write the agrarian history of the country.

There are a number of assumptions that inform this work. The first is that while the period in question is too short to be the back cloth of an agrarian *history*, there have been sig-

1 See, e.g., Pausewang et al (eds) 1990 and the references in it; also proceedings of the international Ethiopian studies conferences of the 1980s.

nificant changes in social and economic institutions in rural Ethiopia- indeed, one may argue that the changes in the last half century have been far more substantial and far-reaching than perhaps at any time in the last hundred years of the country's history. And, as Marc Bloch, the noted French agrarian historian pointed out a long time ago, history is that which is primarily concerned with change and its processes. Secondly, I see the *peasant* and the *state* as the chief actors on the agrarian stage, and, the relations between one and the other -reflected in diverse ways but based in the end on hegemony and subordination- the central element of the story. Even in past centuries, when the struggle between the monarchy and the belligerent nobles and warlords held centre-stage, the motive behind the struggle was not just for political power but also the power to control peasant labor and the peasant "surplus", as has been shown by the work of Crummey (2000).

I am well aware that rural Ethiopia is immensely diverse, specially in terms of natural resources, farming practices and livelihood systems, but at the same time, peasants all over have many things in common. Quite apart from the commonalities imposed by poverty and its consequences, their response to new opportunities and to the hegemonic pressures for change and accommodation has by and large been similar. One can thus speak of the common aspects of the agrarian system and institutions without ignoring the geographical and human contrasts, or the need to employ what Jeffrey Sachs calls "differential diagnosis".

While each study may appear to be separate and unconnected, there is an underlying thread that links all of them. In order to explain what this thread is I will have to digress briefly and sketch the outlines of some of the main theoretical debates concerning long-run agrarian change and its prime causes. These "meta-narratives" have often been part of theories proposed to explain the larger problem of social transformation from the pre-modern to the modern, or from poverty and stagnation to prosperity and growth. My purpose here is not to provide a full and critical appraisal but rather to note a gap which is important in our context, namely the contribution

of the human agent, in particular the direct producer, to the change process.

Key Factors in Agrarian Change

We may begin our review with theories of agricultural development which were the mainstream discourse dominating the debate on "rural development" from the 1950s to the 70s². At the time, these theories were favoured by donor agencies and international organizations, but also accepted uncritically by policy planners in the developing countries. There are two main variations of this, and the second of them has been adopted by the present government as the central plank for its rural development strategy. The older variant, exemplified by the dual economy approach, which became an important element of modernization theory, argues that the smallholder and subsistence sector of the rural economy, which was dominant in most under-developed countries, holds no prospects for productivity growth and increased income, instead one should look to the modern sector of the economy for the stimulus to growth. In this country, the dual economy model envisaged a shift from the traditional to the modern occurring through the instrumentality of the market, the diffusion of new technologies and the growth of large and mechanized farm enterprises. The second variant of the theory reversed the argument by positing that small farms are indeed efficient and are capable of being the engine of agricultural growth and economic development. In both cases, whether through modern large-scale or smallholder farms, agricultural growth was seen as stimulating demand for non-farm goods and services and creating a growing market for industrial products. Broadly speaking, the dominant discourse of this period was concerned with the enabling environment for the interplay of economic forces (markets, prices, investments, etc.), and ignored the significance of the issue of power relationships and the human agents themselves. It gave great

2 For a short review of theories of rural development from the 1950s to 2000s, see Ellis and Biggs 2001.

significance to the economic soundness of rural policies and the technicalities of development management.

Moving on further afield, I would like to look at four explanatory models that have enjoyed wide currency in the historical debate on agrarian change: these are the Marxist approach of which Brenner is an important voice, the science and technology argument, the commercialization and urbanization approach, and the demographic model associated with the work of both Boserup and LeRoy Ladurie.

Robert Brenner³, who was responsible for initiating a wide-ranging debate on the dynamics of agrarian change in pre-modern Europe, has argued that the indispensable pre-condition for agrarian development there was the transformation of the agrarian class structure and the establishment of new relations of production in the countryside (Brenner 1985). The emergence of capitalism was marked by the displacement of peasant agriculture on a large scale and the redefinition of property rights. In England, where the process of transformation was effected much earlier, the ground was prepared by reforms which denied the peasant secure rights of property and enabled the landlords to concentrate land in their hands and to lease them out to tenant farmers who operated them as capitalist enterprises. Brenner maintains that the loss of peasant freehold rights in England provided landlords the opportunity to "engross, consolidate and enclose, to create large farms" operated with large capital investments and new technologies (*ibid.*: 49). Brenner admits that peasant production is capable of improvements, particularly of increasing crop output through the intensification of labour but not through the greater efficiency of its labour force. He argues instead that improvements in labour productivity, which is the more important for agrarian transition, are best achieved on large-scale operations utilising high capital inputs. Brenner belongs to that school of thought which since Marx has been arguing that the road to structural change and productivity improvements lies in extending the

3 Due to limitations of space I have left out the neo-Marxist argument relating to Third World countries today.

scale of operations, with the family farm and small producer giving place to the large enterprise deploying large numbers of wage labourers.

Rapid advances in technology as the prime mover of social and economic change has many adherents among liberal historians and economists. For our purposes here it is sufficient to note the works of David Landes (1999) and Jeffrey Sachs (2005). While the first is a work of world economic history and the second concerned with contemporary problems of poverty reduction, their view of the driving force of human progress is remarkably similar. Both hold that scientific knowledge and technical innovations have played a pivotal role in setting off what is often called the "great transformation (i.e. the Industrial Revolution) and in economic growth and prosperity since. Sachs is more emphatic believing that "the single most important reason why prosperity spread, and it continues to spread, is the transmission of technologies and the ideas underlying them. Even more important than having specific resources in the ground, such as coal, was the ability to use modern, science-based ideas to organize production" (p. 41).

Commercialization and the growth of towns as a driving force for agrarian change has attracted a good deal of attention in the historical debate. The central argument here is that the expansion of trade, particularly increasing agricultural commercialization, accompanied by the growing influence of trading towns led to the dismantling of pre-modern agrarian systems and to a dynamic farm economy and higher rates of productivity. Agricultural commercialization provided a strong incentive for the consolidation of holdings, the adoption of more capitalist forms of production, and the use of improved technology to raise productivity and to encourage efficient methods of work (Barrington Moore 1966⁴). Here, economic growth is closely associated with urbanization and mobility as

⁴ While Moore's major concern is broadly the field of political history (why some transformation in some countries led to liberal democracy while in others to fascism and dictatorship, the underlying impulse to agrarian change running through his work is the influence of commercialization and urbanization.

more people engaged in the rural sector move out of the sector to seek non-farm employment and a new way of life. Neo-Marxists may question the relevance of this explanatory model to Third World rural economies on the grounds that globalization has marginalized poor and weak nations and there are few chances for increasing trade and commerce for them today, but proponents of commercialization may cite examples from the contemporary experience in Asia to support their case.

The demographic model which concerns us here has to do with the work of Ester Boserup and that of Le Roy Ladurie. The main thrust of Boserup's theory is that population growth has an impact on both innovation and the spread of new technologies internally as well as externally (1965, 1981). Population increase, she argues, has a positive impact in that it leads to the intensification of farm operations, specialization of production and to greater investment on the land. It stimulates new technologies, and in the past, it has been responsible for the shift from hoe to plow agriculture, and brought about improved land management and soil protection practices. Population growth also induces technology diffusion either through the process of migration or through importing technologies from other areas to make up for short-falls that may have been brought on initially by more people competing for scarce resources (1981). Boserup holds an optimistic view of population growth because of its impact on technology and because she believes technology has been the engine of social and economic progress. She often speaks of population "increase", "growth" or "change", with the accent on the positive, rather than population "pressure" which suggests a problem with harmful impact.

The broad outlines of Le Roy Ladurie's secular Malthusianism and his "great agrarian cycle" (1974) may be described as follows. A rural economy enters into a phase of decline due to the lack of new technology and its inability to improve productivity, but at the same time, the population continues to grow. The combination of overpopulation and agricultural stagnation leads to greater subdivision of the land, the cultivation of more marginal areas, soil fertility loss, and thus de-

clining income and greater poverty. As if to correct itself, overpopulation is followed by population collapse brought on by famine, pandemics and other disasters that have the effect of depopulating rural society. This lays the ground for the next phase, the new agrarian cycle, which begins with economic regeneration through the greater availability of land, the existing store of technology and gradual improvements in production and income.

At first sight, this appears as a suitable model to explain the reality in rural Ethiopia: overpopulation is a critical factor here, the process of impoverishment is well advanced, and there have been frequent famines and pandemics. But a closer examination of conditions here in the period under discussion reveals a complex picture, and while some changes in settlement patterns and land management have been induced by population growth (e.g. highland shifting to lowland areas, the loss of the forest cover), the demographic model raises more questions than it answers. To begin with, there is no evidence of improved economic performance following famines and pandemics and the consequent easing of the population pressure that this is supposed to give rise to. On the contrary, the evidence we have in this country is that there is a considerable period of reduced economic performance following disasters, in some cases with communities not being able to recover for a decade or more (Yared 2002). Indeed, a population collapse of the kind suggested by the demographic approach would aggravate the ongoing agricultural decline over a long period rather than the opposite. Secondly, different population groups respond to demographic pressure in different ways: some, like the populations in the *enset* culture complex in the Rift Valley areas, adopted a demographic-tolerant farming system that has enabled the areas to carry a much greater population density without being subject to periodic population collapse. Finally, despite the frequency of famines and pandemics, the country's population has been growing at an increasingly high rate over the last fifty years, thus contradicting one of the main pillars of Le Roy Ladurie's demographic argument.

McCann has attempted to employ a variation of the

"demographic model" to explain the rural history of Ethiopia in the last hundred or so years (1987, 1995). McCann argues that continuous population growth from the nineteenth century onwards, and the consequent increase in the demand for food has pushed cultivation into the more marginal areas and fragile ecosystems. Population growth combined with the use of ox-plow technology has been responsible for pushing settlements into new natural settings and the large-scale clearing of forest areas, however, these processes failed to provide the stimulus for radical change in agricultural system or to sustained growth in farm production primarily because of long-term technological stagnation.

The Argument in Brief

In all these works the role played by the human agent and the institutional environment impacting on human *agency* is either ignored or given insufficient attention. I believe, in our context, the question of human agency, that is, the agency of the men and women who are responsible for cultivating the land and managing the resources associated with it, and the institutions that have helped or hindered them in their endeavour, must be placed at the centre of the agrarian debate. My concept of the term *human agency* here is similar in some ways to Sen's idea of *capability*. By agency I mean the ability to make independent decisions and free choices to bring about a desired outcome, and to secure the benefits free of imposition or coercion. It means the ability to have a voice, and to be an *active force* even if in a small way. Human agency is cumulative and expandable: a person's agency may be enhanced or inhibited depending on access to livelihood opportunities, education and health services, information and knowledge. However, a major determining factor is the nature of the rules of governance, particularly rights, freedoms and obligations embodied either in social values and norms or formal political institutions. The term "empowerment" has become quite current of late, and, as will be evident in the discussion later in this work, I take it to be an important aspect of human agency.

In one of his works on the history of civilization, Braudel argued that the history of Europe, in contrast to that of other continents, was marked by what he calls the stubborn growth of liberties. The process by which such liberties were acquired by social groups, used or abused, defended and expanded, he says, "is one of the secrets that explain Europe's progress." While the peasants were among the first to begin to be liberated, in the eleventh century, they were the last to be fully free, a development which he places in the eighteenth century with the impact of the French Revolution (1993: pp 315-319). The peasant, he says

is free, in our sense of the term, only if no outside interest – seigneurial, urban or capitalist – comes between him and the land; if he is subject to no bond-service; and finally, if his work is productive enough to feed him and leaves a surplus, and if this surplus, should it reach the nearby market, does not simply make the fortune of some intermediary, but enables the peasant to buy, at the very least, what he needs (:316)

This notion of "freedom" has a resonance for us here – just replace the word "seigneurial" with "state" – and supports what I am trying to suggest by the concept of human agency. In these few words, Braudel has defined the essentials of *peasant* freedom in the centuries until full liberation was achieved. Obviously, these are limited freedoms, consisting of the right to the land without any outside imposition, the right to work freely and for oneself not for others, the adequacy of the product from the land (today this would be phrased as the right to food), and the right to dispose of the product from the land to benefit the producers themselves. These freedoms do not include, for example, the right to choose one's leaders, to have a voice, the right to justice, or other political rights, nevertheless, they were basic and provided the ground for a measure of peasant autonomy. Ethiopian peasants have not enjoyed this kind of freedom, and I believe this has been responsible to a large extent for the failure of agrarian progress in this country.

My main point in brief is that while there have been a number of significant institutional and social changes in rural Ethiopia in the period under review, their impact on the population concerned has been contradictory. On the one hand, agrarian change has removed some of the forces of peasant domination, but on the other hand, it has enhanced the power of the state over the peasant and inhibited the agency of the rural producers. The running thread that links the essays in this volume revolves around these two arguments.

I would like to end this short introduction on a more personal note. Since the last years of the 1970s I have had many occasions to visit the rural areas, to talk to peasants and peasant leaders, and observe their life and work. I was a witness when the countryside was in turmoil following the radical land reform of the Derg. I saw what happened and talked to many peasants about the events during the next rural turmoil when the Derg regime collapsed and with it the system of rural governance that many had found intolerable. Since then and in-between these events I have made numerous field visits in both the northern and southern parts of the country. As a citizen and sympathizer of peasant aspirations, who has seen hopes dashed, expectations frustrated, and opportunities missed, I feel outraged at the continuing suffering and hardship of the people.

After more than fifty years of programs of "rural development" and considerable outlay of resources, and despite the change of governments and development ideologies, Ethiopian peasants are, in many ways, not much better off today than they were at the beginning of the 1950s. True, there is a limited network of rural roads, some modern transportation, expanding education and health services in scattered villages, but the benefits of these pale into insignificance beside the colossal suffering endured by rural society during this half century. There have been five virulent famines, several silent ones, and numerous rural pandemics in these years in which perhaps up to two million people may have perished. Every year since the mid-

1970s millions of peasants are officially declared to be facing hunger, and recurrent mass starvation is avoided only because of emergency assistance provided by foreign donors. The country as a whole, and the countryside in particular, has become a museum of diseases, and millions of peasants suffer from malaria and cholera outbreaks, and the AIDS pandemics. All comparative measures of well being employed by international agencies, such as nutritional status, child mortality, access to health services, education and clean water, etc., indicate that conditions in rural Ethiopia are truly appalling, perhaps the worst in Africa. Independent assessments show that more than half the rural population lives in grinding poverty, with about a third considered destitute and standing on the edge of the abyss. Over these years, the loss of natural resources through soil erosion, deforestation, and other forms of environmental degradation, has gone on unchecked and on a massive scale. In brief, the last half-century has been a time of misery and unmitigated suffering for rural people.

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PEASANTS AND RURAL POLICIES

Agriculture under the Imperial Regime

The agricultural history of the imperial period (i.e. from the 1950s to the fall of the regime in the 1970s) is interesting for a number of reasons. First, in parts of the cereal growing areas of the north and the *enset* complex of the south -which together support some two-thirds of the country's rural population- peasant agriculture was undergoing a slow but steady process of decline. This was evidenced by diminishing resources, increasing vulnerability, and growing rural poverty. Having reached the limits of its development potential and failed to transform itself, peasant agriculture persisted with reduced vitality by the sheer strength of its inherited techniques and accumulated experience. Access to land and other means of production became more difficult and more complicated, the subordination of the rural producer to the landed classes and subsequently the imperial state grew more pronounced. On the other hand, there were areas showing promising prospects in the central, southeastern, and southwestern regions of the country, where attempts were being made to invigorate smallholder production by means of what were called the package programmes. Secondly, in this same period, peasant agriculture became the object of state policy; this is perhaps what sets the agrarian history of the Old Regime apart from its predecessors. Through its successive Five-Year Development Plans, state policy sought to stimulate agricultural growth, and to promote changes in peasant agronomy. As we shall see below, however, these policies had a limited impact, and part of the blame lies in state perceptions of the peasant economy, and in the orientation of development planning itself. Development policies had a clear class bias: they favoured the landlord and the emerging capital-

ist farmer. But even when they occasionally sought to provide support to the peasant sector, they were handicapped by the decision-makers' ideological bias, which considered small-holder agriculture as backward and which held Western-style, technology-driven, and large-scale agriculture to be the only alternative.

Moreover, there were other equally significant aspects of the policies and policy-making. First, the Imperial regime was wholly dependent on the donor community not just for funds to finance its development programs but also for the design and planning of the very policies and programs. On the other hand, donor groups had very limited knowledge of the countryside and the farming systems in place, and quite frequently were not keen to find out the real needs and priorities of the farming population. As we shall see below, there were only a few attempts (outside academic anthropologists and historians) to examine the rural reality, at least until the last years of the regime. The peasant was in effect "invisible", and considered irrelevant to development planning and management. Donor groups for the most part came equipped with the latest development theory and saw their task as putting this in practical form. The imperial authorities were content to let them set the priorities and prepare the plans, but there were a few important concerns that expatriate or local planners were allowed to trespass into and these had to do with institutional reforms affecting property ownership and power relations.

General Review

The pitfalls of discussing peasant agriculture in the period in question are many, of which the most serious have to do with the diversity of the country and the paucity of reliable data. The diversity of the country in terms of agricultural ecology and resource potential has been noted by agronomists and geographers, but the significance of this diversity to the rural economy, and to the potential for agrarian change remains insufficiently explored even to this day. The dearth of scientific knowledge about the country's natural endowments, and of re-

liable data about many aspects of rural production -a problem relatively more limiting at the time than at present- inhibits theorization or sustained analysis. The first 'census' of agriculture based on a more reliable field survey was carried out by MoA in 1974/75, but even this offers only basic data about limited aspects of agriculture.

Opinion is divided about the agro-ecological profile of the country. In the early 1960s, a visiting agronomist, using no better evidence than old physical maps, identified eight broad agro-ecological regions in the country (Bunting 1963). Westphal, writing about a decade later, accepted Bunting's judgment but added three more regions of his own, making a total of eleven (1974, 1975). A recent study, which is based on more modern scientific techniques, identifies fifteen agro-ecological regions, which are then subdivided into 140 agro-ecological zones. An ecological zone is a micro-region, which is sufficiently uniform in climate, physiography and soil patterns (FAO 1988: 88ff). The final verdict of the agronomists and ecologists has probably not yet been made; be that as it may, what is worthy of note for us is the multiform ecology of the country, and the complex variety of agricultural endeavour and material life this involves. In traditional agriculture such as ours, natural conditions and endowments determine the range of crops that can be grown, farming practices, responses to the environment, and, in direct or indirect ways, consumption patterns and household dynamics.

The diversity of natural conditions is almost matched by the diversity of agricultural systems. Westphal has identified four *major* agricultural systems that I have found useful. He calls these the seed-farming complex (corresponding basically to the food-grain producing regions of northern, eastern and western Ethiopia), the *enset* planting complex, shifting agriculture (practiced mostly by minorities living along the full length of the western border of the country), and pastoral production. While it is neither exhaustive nor perfect, the merit of this approach is that the distinguishing elements are productive practices and environmental adaptation, rather than agro-climate and land potential as has been emphasized in recent studies

(see MoA/FAO studies). In this study, we shall focus mainly on the two main agricultural systems, namely the seed farming and *enset* planting systems.

The first comprehensive study of modern Ethiopian agriculture was made by Huffnagel working under contract for FAO (FAO/Huffnagel 1961). This work is a landmark, for, in contrast to earlier custom, it provided an extended discussion of peasant farm practices, crop regimes and animal husbandry. Here we have, perhaps for the first time, peasant agronomy as the focus of interest in its own right, and peasant labour as a conscious endeavour informed by practical experience. While Huffnagel never lets us forget the numerous shortcomings of peasant production, he nonetheless offers us a relatively detailed examination of the rationale of peasant enterprise and the quality of cultivation and soil management techniques. It took over a decade before another work of similar scope and depth of detail appeared. Westphal (1974, 1975) focused on the complex agronomic and ecological conditions of the country and examined peasant production in its multiform environmental settings. Both works, it should be noted, show considerable appreciation - the latter more so than the former - for peasant endeavour and technical competence.

There were a number of specialized studies with a regional focus that appeared in our period, and some of these are worthy of note for their perceptive observations, and for breaking ranks with the "peasant is backward" outlook prevalent at the time. Simoon's book (1960), a work of cultural geography focusing on rural life in what was then Begemdir and Semien province, falls midway in between: it is highly informative but defective in its analytical approach and its conclusions. The author examined the rural economy and agricultural regime of the people of the province in the framework of their beliefs systems, and argued that cultural attitudes have a strong bearing on environmental consciousness and such consciousness inhibits agricultural progress. His approach is really a variation of the "cultural backwardness" theme dominant at the time he was writing (see below), and his conclusions are far from convincing. On the other hand, the work of Jackson and his associ-

ates (Jackson et al. 1969) demonstrates how peasant adaptive skills respond to the challenge of unfavorable human and environmental conditions such as high population density, scarcity of resources, rugged topography, etc. The study focuses on the eastern highlands of Gamo Goffa and the minority nationalities who live there. Peasants here practice intensive cultivation combining root crops with cereals, and employ sophisticated and environmentally responsible agricultural techniques, which has enabled them to maintain themselves in food balance in the face of immense difficulties. The work is a tribute to the resilience of *enset*-based smallholder enterprise, and the resourcefulness of peasant cultivators.

Another work of a similar nature is that of Noel Cossins (1974). His monograph is about the central highlands, specifically about northern Shoa, western Wollo, central Tigray and southeastern Gondar provinces – areas of rugged physiography, fiercely independent peasantry, and of endemic environmental disaster. The focus is on the hardy nature of the peasantry and the precarious nature of survival, both of which have combined to shape agricultural practices and environmental consciousness. This is a work of environmental economy centered on the ceaseless struggle between man and nature in which the latter is frequently victorious but the former refuses to give up. Here we have an inhospitable natural setting, a fragile ecology, and a tenacious peasantry whose adaptive skills have been stretched to the limit -if not altogether exhausted- in the face of these colossal difficulties (cf. Bauer 1977).

The donor agencies which supported the government's development effort (meaning mainly the World Bank and USAID) had their own bias with respect to development strategies and priorities. The 1950s and 1960s was the heyday of Modernization Theory in the West, and the principal objective of development was believed to be to replace "tradition" with "modernity". This was also the time when the idea "big is better" was unquestionably accepted among economists and the donor community. The road to prosperity was seen to lie in large-scale enterprises employing modern technology and modern methods of management. Up until 1973

or thereabouts, when it quickly reversed itself and began to loudly advocate peasant-based green revolution programmes, the World Bank's "agricultural modernization" strategy for the country placed high hopes on agricultural mechanization and large-scale commercial farms. This position was shared by USAID whose advisors were impressed with the prospects of commercial agriculture, which was expanding rapidly at the time (World Bank 1972; SRI 1969D, USDA 1969).

It is probably safe to say that the US was one of the key influences in agricultural policy-making during the Old Regime. The others which also strongly influenced policy formulation and government thinking in general were the World Bank, Sweden through its CADU and EPID projects, and FAO through its fertilizer promotion programmes. American influence on Ethiopian thinking on agricultural development and planning prevailed through its training programme in Alemaya and Jimma, its design of the country's extension services and its support of a few high-profile agricultural projects. It was however the two teaching institutions, Alemaya Agricultural College (founded in 1954) and Jimma Agricultural School (1952), which left behind the most significant legacy. The ideas they bequeathed to a generation of students, and the objectives which they promoted has had considerable impact on the thinking of local specialists and policy planners⁵. A few words on US involvement in Ethiopian agriculture is thus in order.

The earliest technical cooperation agreement between the U.S. and Ethiopia goes back to 1951, and from roughly this time to about 1965 US support to the country went mostly to agricultural education and training of extension personnel. In the period between 1965 and 1970, on the other hand, USAID placed more emphasis on strengthening institutional capacity for agricultural development, and a good deal of fi-

⁵ See annual reports submitted to the Government by the two institutions; USOM/E 1955-1965, Vols 2-12; IECAMA 1953; Experimental Station Bulletin (Alemaya College) Nos. 1, 1955 to 60, 1969. For a short history of US involvement in Ethiopian agriculture, see Adams 1970.

nancial and technical support was provided to the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) with this aim in mind. After 1970, however, the Agency became involved in financing large-scale, regional development schemes such as those at Ada, Shashemene and Borkena (Adams 1970). But despite its shift of emphasis, agricultural education remained an important priority, and USAID continued to support the two teaching institutions, Alemaya and Jimma, both of which were staffed by instructors recruited from American universities.

The American instructors who came to teach at the schools strongly believed that what Ethiopia needed was high technology, and scientific techniques of cultivation and farm management. The model they had in mind and which they placed before their students was American agriculture, and they were naive enough to believe that a transformation along these lines was quite possible. Alemaya College in particular was for its time a high-tech marvel, with the most advanced equipment and the most modern teaching and service facilities. It was the goal of the college to prepare agricultural agents "in the higher technical and scientific branches of agriculture" (S. Pankhurst 1957) as is done in the developed countries. There was hardly any two-way interaction between the teaching units and the surrounding peasantry, and for this and other reasons the American staff had many unfounded views about the peasant and peasant enterprise. They earnestly believed that experience had not taught the peasant much about farming or the environment. The "problem of soil erosion in Ethiopia," states their first report, written before any of them had had the chance to examine existing agricultural practices seriously, "is easily recognized by soil scientists but the average farmer either does not understand what erosion is, or else refuses to believe that it can and does exist in this country" (IECAMA 1953: 153). As we shall see below, soil protection forms an essential element of peasant farming practices. Because of their ignorance of small-holder agriculture, they tended to think that anything that was not large-scale and worked by high technology was a throw-back to pre-historic times. "We see in Ethiopia today," one of the instructors wrote, "a stone-age agriculture very similar to

the kind of agriculture which existed in Mesopotamia at least 10, 000 years ago ..." (Damon 1962: 11). On occasions, their view of the peasant borders on the bizarre. They earnestly believed that the Ethiopian peasant was the most conscientious person in the world. "The fact that there are purchase taxes on some products," explains one of the reports of the college staff, "may be an additional reason why the farmer insists on going to the market place; that is where the tax collector is found" (Vol. III: 89). The teaching staff found it hard to understand why the Ethiopian "farmer" did not behave like the American farmer and sell his harvest, in the silo, to the grain dealer without going to the market himself. In the end, though Alemaya graduates may have been well equipped to manage large-scale farms, their training nevertheless placed them at odds with peasant agriculture.

Writing about a decade after the US training programme had been established, Bunting saw considerable shortcomings in both Alemaya and Jimma. The American staff, he pointed out, had neither research experience nor even research ability; none of the teachers brought to either of the institutions had experiences in tropical agriculture, which would have been more relevant to the country (*ibid*: 17-18). Indeed, according to documentary evidence, many of the research endeavours consisted for the most part of demonstrations of technical innovations scaled down ostensibly to Ethiopian conditions but hardly marketable in the rural areas. One significant research effort, however, was in soils, the classification and inventory of which was carried out over many years (Murphy 1963, 1968).

The Dynamics of Peasant Agronomy

So often has peasant agriculture been condemned for its backwardness and for having held back the country's progress that the view has come to be accepted as an article of faith, without doubt or question. The peasantry, it is claimed, is strongly attached to its traditional ways, and sticks tenaciously to customary practices even when these are shown to be less efficient and less productive; change in other words is fiercely resisted

and even considered immoral. It is therefore essential to briefly look at the condition of peasant agriculture, its inherent dynamic and the potential it did or did not hold.

Indigenous agricultural technology in this country is superior to that achieved by peasant farmers in sub-Saharan Africa. Peasant farming techniques here reflect considerable knowledge of soil management, environmental protection, and of regeneration of the fertility of the soil. Contour ploughing and ploughing to control run off, mulching, ratooning, soil bunding and terracing are widely practiced in many parts of the country. Water control and management techniques range from the sophisticated irrigation networks of the Gamo Goffa peasantry to the simple spring canal schemes found in Wollo and Begemdir. The fertility of the soil is maintained through a complex system of crop rotation on the one hand, and bare fallowing on the other, which also provides pasturage for livestock (FAO/Huffnagel:143-44; Westphal 1974: 26-27). All peasants know that manuring is good for the soil and contributes to higher yield, and in parts of the south this and other forms of organic fertilization are widely used. Indeed, without organic fertilization and considerable knowledge of soil management, the densely populated regions of the *enset*-planting complex would not have been able to survive. Here, a population density of 300 to 400 persons per km² is not uncommon, and average holdings per household are often much below half a hectare. Such is the dynamic of the intensive farming system of the region that peasants have for centuries managed to squeeze out of tiny plots of land enough food to sustain themselves and to remain free of the scourge of famine (Dessalegn 1992; Jackson 1970). It is worth noting here that European agriculture relied on organic rather than chemical fertilizers (i.e. mainly animal manure), crop rotation and other biological methods of soil regeneration well into the mid-19th century.

There is considerable evidence of peasant adaptability in the area of cropping strategies as well. In the last four to five decades, long-stem crops such as sorghum and maize have grown in importance and in some instances displaced short-stem crops such as teff and barley in many parts of the highlands. These crops

require comparatively less labour, are more stress resistance, and easier to store thus reducing the risk of post-harvest losses. This indicates that the pattern of rural consumption is also undergoing changes. There is evidence too that since the latter part of the 1960s peasants are switching from the traditional barley to oats which is spreading in northern Shoa, southwestern Wollo and parts of Gojjam. Oats is a much hardier crop than barley, requires very little labour, and has higher yield and greater forage value. According to two ILCA agronomists well acquainted with Ethiopian agriculture, the rapid adoption of oats, often against the advice of MoA extension agents, "reveals a high degree of willingness to innovate on the part of [Ethiopian] farmers" when the comparative advantage of a crop or a farming method is clearly apparent (Jutzi and Gryseels 1984; see also Gryseels and Anderson 1983).

Cultivation techniques aimed at improving output and yield include multiple ploughing (which also minimizes weed growth); inter-cropping, i.e. the planting of different crops in the same field in the same season, a practice which also helps maximize land use, protect against crop disease and pests; sequencing of particular crops to benefit from the special advantages of the crops in question; and, in the *enset* zone, combining cereals with root crops in a dynamic way so as to ensure food security.

Such in brief are what I call the "discreet innovations" peasants have pioneered on their own and practiced for generations; but lest readers find these not significant enough, they should bear the following observation in mind. The highland areas of the country have been farmed without interruption for over one thousand years; they have also been the sole source of sustenance for an ever-growing population in this same period. It is a tribute to peasant agronomy and "traditional" techniques of soil management and environmental protection that these same lands (or at least the great portion of them) still have good farming potential today. There is another equally important point we need to remember, namely that far from primitive or archaic, peasant agriculture had in fact reached a level of development comparable in many respects to European agriculture

on the eve of what is known as the agricultural revolution of the 18th century.

All this is not to deny that peasant agriculture suffers from numerous limitations, including poor technology, and inefficient farming methods which over the years have become increasingly inadequate to provide food security to the growing rural population. Even when the peasant has made considerable investment in soil management and conservation he has not always been successful in minimizing the damage to the environment, and on occasions the competition for resources has led to destructive farming practices.

Peasant Agriculture: The Record

When the full economic history of the Old Regime is finally written, it will reveal that the Regime's most damaging failure was in the area of agricultural development. While considerable effort was made to build up the modern sector of the economy, with some significant successes particularly in transport, communications and energy, agriculture continued to decline and the rural population became ever more vulnerable to periodic food crises. Of the total of USD 352 million of foreign loans that the country was able to utilize up to 1974, less than eight percent went to agricultural development (CSO 1975). The decline of agriculture is evident from the latter part of the 1950s; perhaps this may be because information on economic matters began to be available from this time on. Actually, the evidence suggests that the problem in some of the rural areas where the population pressure had long been acute - areas in what Cossins called the central highlands, and in the *enset* zone - may have begun three or more decades earlier.

Before we discuss the dynamic of this decline, let us have a brief look at the agricultural resource base of the country. It was common for government officials and policy planners in this period (and the same was true at the time of the military regime) to wax eloquent about the immense potential of the country, and the vast resources that had yet to be utilized. This view was often echoed by the country's foreign backers,

particularly the World Bank which on more than one occasion prepared for the government reports purporting to show (largely on untenable evidence) that the untapped potential of the country was indeed staggering. But the peasants knew better, and except for certain areas which offered farming and employment opportunities and attracted migrants (discussed below), there were no large-scale out-migration of peasants in search of greener pastures. As I have argued elsewhere -and I will have to offer my observations here in brief since the subject is much too involved- the agricultural resources in much of the highlands were fully (often over) utilized, that those lands which seemed to be underutilized were ones which either could not be brought under cultivation using existing peasant technology, or required massive investment in infrastructure and social services. What we have in short is an agrarian regime increasingly under pressure from insufficiency of resources and from a rapidly growing population. It is significant that when commercial agriculture emerged it did not in many cases bring new land into cultivation but rather displaced peasants on a large scale.

Up until the mid-1980s, when with more accurate means of measurement a more realistic assessment of the country's land potential was made, natural resource inventory was essentially guesswork, often revealing the optimism of the assessors themselves. The earliest land assessment was carried out by a FAO consultant at the beginning of the 1950s (MoA 1953); the most recent inventory, based on modern satellite imagery, was published in 1984 (FAO/UNDP 1984). Between the first and the last are considerable differences, but even with the aid of advanced technology the accuracy of the latest inventory is still in question. Be that as it may, the last assessment clearly shows that more than half the area of the country is grazing and browsing land, about a third is not suitable for cultivation, and only about 15 percent is land under utilization. Significantly, the findings reveal that the chances of expanding the resource base for peasant agriculture are severely limited, and of doing the same for modern agriculture are only slightly better.

We may begin our subject by asking how small was small-

holder agriculture in the period under discussion. Household plots varied in size regionally, and the reasons were not always population pressure alone though this was a significant factor, but included the inheritance system in force, the marriage contract, or environmental limitations. In what were known as the *rist* areas, the system of partible inheritance was a cause of fragmentation of holdings, diminution of plots, insecurity, interminable litigation and household conflict. In the *enset* zone, the limitations of the ecology and the requirements of root-crop cultivation confined populations in small areas whose carrying capacity had long been surpassed. Moreover, due to technological limitations few peasants were capable of operating more than five hectares of land, which meant that even a small owner with five or six hectares was more likely to rent part of the land to a tenant operator. On the basis of a variety of regional studies, I estimate that by the end of the 1960s average per capita holdings in Arssi were between two-and-half to three hectares, in Gojjam about two hectares, in north Wollo and parts of Tigrai one to one-and-half hectare, and in the *enset* zone half a hectare or less. I should note here that CSO's first and second round national surveys give much lower figures. Contemporary oral tradition suggests that family holdings in many of these regions were much larger a generation or so earlier, though how much larger they were we do not know.

But along side petty holdings there was landlessness, which is an indicator of poverty and of growing competition for resources. CSO's surveys noted above, for example, show that in Tigrai, Gojjam and Wollo provinces landless households made up 20, 18 and 14 percent of the estimated rural population respectively; the figures are a bit on the high side, but even if we reduce the magnitude by one third, the extent of land shortage is quite considerable. Added to this was the fact that some 30 percent of farming households had no plough oxen at all, 33 percent had only one ox each in the early 1970s (MoA 1975, Vol. I: 50). It is not hard to imagine what a debilitating handicap the shortage of farm oxen can be especially in the predominantly plough-based, seed farming zones of the country.

One of the few government documents to paint a rather uncomplimentary picture of agricultural prospects in the country warns of increasing food scarcity in those regions where a majority of the population lives. The report, prepared for the Ministry of Planning (1967a), shows that only a few areas in the country were food surplus areas, and that in contrast 60 percent of the crop producing *awrajas* were permanently food deficit. The surplus areas were Arssi, Gojjam and Wollega provinces only; parts of Shoa and more than half of Begemdir province were considered in food balance (:34-36; cf. SRI 1969c: 44 ff).

In the area of food consumption, the picture was even darker. The government's estimate of between 175 and 190 kg. of cereal consumption per person per year (or 2000 calories of daily energy intake) was questioned by a number of expert advisors (Ministry of Planning 1967a; Eichberger 1968; Abraham 1972). Abraham was of the opinion that average annual food grain consumption in the late 1960s was 150 kg. per person; this is about 411 gms. per person per day, less than the daily ration (500 gms.) set by RRC for famine victims during the tragedy of 1984/85. More recently, Watt (1988) has estimated that consumption was even lower and declining in the period 1966-1975. On the basis of a minimum daily requirement of 2400 calories per person, a standard accepted by FAO and WHO, a moderately healthy peasant family of five would have to consume 13 quintals of food grain annually, and only the well-to-do peasants, perhaps less than one third of the rural population, were capable of providing themselves with so much food grain in any given year. The available evidence in the 1960s, defective though it may be, indicates in fact that the country would be in food shortage for over a decade, and that greater food imports would be necessary. The view of some specialists was that any increase in food production that may be achieved through improvements in peasant farming would go to feed the rural population and very little of it would be available for exports (SRI 1968).

Food imports in fact grew in importance in the 1960s, and reached their highest level in the early 1970s. In the pe-

riod 1945 to 1954, the country was a significant exporter of food. Indeed, stimulated by high world grain prices and shortage of food grain in the world market following World War II, the country boosted its grain exports in the second half of the 1940s (SRI 1969D). In 1946, Ethiopia exported 135 000 metric tons of grain, in 1947 the figure had reached 154 000. In the early 1950s annual exports averaged 84 000 metric tons; in contrast, in the late 1960s they were 72 000 (not including coffee). While exports in the 1945-55 period were mostly cereals, and other food crops were not significant, exports in the 1960s and early '70s were dominated by pulses (horse and haricot beans, lentils). Beginning in the second half of the 1950s, the situation was reversed: cereal exports steadily declined, food imports steadily grew in importance. Wheat imports in fact became significant beginning in 1952, reversing a seven-year export record. Food imports, which reached 83 000 metric tons in 1970, consisted of wheat, rice, sorghum, maize, oats, flour of all kinds and barley malt (Experience Inc. 1972, Report II, Annex C for all figures given here). Food import figures for the 1960s and '70s do not include food aid, which became significant in the mid-1960s and in 1974-75.

There is insufficient documentation on the history of food aid in this country, though we know that the World Food Programme (WFP), which serves as the main conduit of multi-lateral food aid to Third World countries, began its operations here in 1965. In the next few years, due to famine and recurrent food shortages in various parts of the country, WFP as well as individual donors shipped in emergency food aid. Food-for-Work schemes using food aid may have been initiated about the end of 1970 when food grain was used to pay for conservation activities in Tigray and Eritrea provinces. While statistical data on food aid deliveries to the country in the 1960s is hard to come by, FAO sources indicate that food aid increased substantially in the last half decade of the Old Regime. From a modest figure in 1970-71, food aid deliveries reached 25 thousand MT in 1972, rose to 96 thousand two years later in 1973-74, and stood at 54 thousand in 1975 (FAO 1983: 20).

Information on crop output and productivity stretching over many years or decades is not available, and hence we cannot measure accurately the performance of agriculture and the state of the peasant economy. The best we have are estimates of output and yield made in different periods, by different sources, and using different methods, which makes comparative analysis virtually impossible. The figures in Table 1.1 below are provided with this proviso, and while they may indicate a rough order of magnitude, they do not allow close comparison. They may perhaps suggest that the performance of peasant production over the three decades was far from outstanding; this conclusion is supported by circumstantial evidence and some reports, which will be discussed later. The optimistic assessment of the government contained in the First and Second development plans, which claimed steady progress had been made in food production in the 1950s and 1960s, cannot be sustained.

Perhaps the most telling evidence of the poor condition of peasant agriculture was the periodic food crises and famines that ravaged the country. Such disasters were not peculiar to the Old Regime; they were part of the peasant life experience in all earlier periods and centuries. What made the tragedies particularly deplorable was that they occurred in the twentieth century, in conditions of improved transport and communication, and in the face of considerable opportunities for assistance from the world community.

Table 1.1: Crop Yield for Selected Years
(Quintals/Hectare)

Crops	1956	1965/66	1974/75
Barley	3	8.3	7.5
Teff	6.9	6	7
Sorghum	6.6	8.2	8.8
Maize	5	10	10.9
Wheat	3.7	7.3	8.2

Source: FAO/Huffnagel for 1956 figures (selected years, excluding Eritrea); CSO 1967 for 1965/66 figures; MoA 1975 for 1974/75 figures.

The following were years of localized and large-scale famine in the country: 1953-54, 1957-58, 1962-66, and 1973-74, of which the last two were the most devastating to the peasantry, and the most damaging to the Old Regime (see Essay 6 in this volume).

The subject of famine, its causes and consequences is beyond the scope of this essay; besides, the last two famines have been covered extensively in several works that are easily accessible (Mesfin Wolde Mariam 1984; Shepherd 1975). The first two famines are relatively localized affairs; they are confined to Wollo and Tigray, and parts of Eritrea. These areas, together with part of northern Shoa, are the traditional famine zones of the country. The disaster of the 1960s was more prolonged, more damaging to life and property, and more exhausting to the peasantry. While the traditional famine areas were the main victims of the disaster, areas in the southwest also experienced starvation following a prolonged drought in 1965-66. The last famine, the worst tragedy to have occurred during the Old Regime, became a world event partly because of the scale of the suffering involved, but more importantly because of the attempt that was made by government officials to cover it up. Peasants in large parts of the northeast bore the brunt of the disaster; however rural areas in the east and the south were also badly battered.

These three famines (there may have been some more localized disasters) took a heavy toll of life and property, making the rural world ever more fragile and more vulnerable. It is customary in this country to attribute famine to natural causes - the failure of the rains, pest infestation, and locust invasion, etc. - however, natural disaster is only the last straw that triggers the forces of destruction already latent in society. Famine is a measure of the vulnerability of the peasant world as well as of its resilience, a reflection of the nature of class relations as well as of the relations between state and peasantry. Famines do not occur if peasant economy is robust, if the popular classes in the rural areas have a tradition of social assertiveness and resistance, or if the state is in some manner accountable to the people.

The increasing vulnerability of the peasantry, particularly in the central highlands, and the gradual opening up of seasonal job opportunities gave rise to migration of peasants to the southern, southeastern and southwestern parts of the country. Population relocation had been going on for many decades even prior to the Haile Selassie era, but it was in the 1940s and later that the movement of peasants outside of their place of origin became quite significant. Here we shall be concerned with rural-to-rural and not rural-to-urban migration.

A.P. Wood (1977, 1982), whose work is perhaps the most thorough, distinguishes between long distance and short distance migration. Most of the migration in our period is of the latter kind, and it involved, typically, peasants moving to the lowland areas adjacent to their homes; in this way a large part of culturally marginal land has been brought under cultivation since the 1940s. Long distant migration and settlement took place on a smaller scale and gradually over time. Three main periods of long distant migration may be distinguished here: the first is in the early 1940s, soon after the end of the Italian invasion; only a small number of peasants were involved. The second is in the latter half of the 1950s, when, due to greater vulnerability and greater population pressure in the northern highlands, a large number of peasants went to settle in the Arssi-Bale plains, and in the southwestern provinces.

Table 1.2. Redistribution of Peasantry 1940-1970

Migrants	Areas of Migration
Wollo Peasants	Awash Valley; Setit; Mettekel area (Gojjam); W. Kaffa; Southwest; Goffa area.
Tigraian Peasants	W. Tigray lowlands; Setit; Awash Valley; Rift Valley; Southwest; W. Kaffa.
Shoa Peasants	Arssi/Bale; Southwest; Kaffa.
Begemdir & Gojjam	Setit; Southwest; Goffa area.

Source: Author's own field notes; Wood; Lexander; Knutsson.

The last period is the mid-1960s and after; attracted by employment opportunities opened up by the coffee boom of half a decade earlier, and by large-scale agricultural and agro-industrial enterprises, a large number of peasants flocked to the Awash and Rift Valleys, to the northwestern lowlands (the Setit Basin), and to the coffee growing areas, notably western Kaffa. Table 1.2 above is a summary of peasant migration in this period.

Some of the migrants were temporary job seekers, returning home after a stint of employment, but many settled for extended periods, some even permanently, farming either as small owners or share-croppers. The number of seasonal or settler migrants is hard to determine, but some estimates of seasonal migration is possible from the existing fragmentary evidence (see next essay in this work). Upto a quarter of a million peasants may have been beneficiaries of seasonal employment in the various plantations, commercial farms and agro-industrial schemes in the Awash and Rift Valleys and in the Setit Basin; if we add to this the considerable number of peasant migrants who traveled to the coffee areas every year, the total number of seasonal migrants is quite impressive.

Peasant agriculture was operating in difficult circumstances partly for the reasons given above, and partly because it was burdened by a variety of state and landlord exactions. Agricultural taxation consisted of the land tax, cattle tax (applicable mainly in pastoral areas), and agricultural income tax which was introduced in 1967 to replace the old tax-in-lieu of tithe⁶. The land tax, to be paid by the land owner, was often passed on to the tenant, and while it was not burdensome, it was complicated since it was based on whether the land was measured or unmeasured (higher tax if measured), its fertility, and the province in which it was located. Agricultural income tax was assessed on annual income levels, and for many peasants it was Eth. \$6.50 or less. There were also the education and health taxes both of which were levied on the same basis as the

6 For the tax and other agricultural legislation, see Consolidated Laws of Ethiopia.

land tax and collected at the same time. The total tax obligation of a peasant owner-operator working one to two hectares of land would be between Eth \$4.00 and 10.00 depending on his annual income; peasants paid 20 Birr in taxes during the military regime. The point however was the iniquitous nature of tax assessment and payment, which was a source of irritation among many peasants. Through a variety of loopholes and corruption almost all large landlords, and many smaller ones, ended up paying no taxes at all on their property. The tax was often passed on to the tenantry, which had no choice on the matter.

Of all the peasant groups, the tenantry was burdened the most. Apart from the various taxes they had to pay the state, tenant farmers had a number of obligations to the landlord, of which land rent was the most onerous. Customary practices, which differed from region to region, set rent at one-third to one-half of the harvest, but it was not uncommon in some areas for landlords to demand more. Tenants had neither written contracts nor guarantees that the land they were working would not be rented to someone else at short notice. While abrupt termination of rental arrangements was not widespread, tenants nonetheless laboured in an uncertain environment, in which security of tenure and of produce was never assured. Many tenants therefore attempted to overcome this by staying in good terms with their landlords, which often meant providing them additional labour services, and "gifts" of various kinds on special occasions.

As was noted earlier, the agricultural data in various official documents are almost worthless since they were based on guesswork, or collected through questionable methods. In the area of revenue, trade and import/exports, there was more reliable information. Agriculture was a significant source of state revenue (though not the most significant), contributing in the early 1970s between 15 to 18 percent of total revenue. Moreover its potential as a future source of additional taxes did not pass without notice by decision-makers at the time (World Bank 1973, Vol. III, Annex 13).

Virtually all the country's exports consisted of agricul-

tural goods, some 90 percent of which originated from the peasant sector. Some oil seeds, pulses and some livestock products were all that modern agriculture contributed to the export drive. Coffee, the country's main export, accounting upto 60 percent of export earnings in the 1960s, was mostly a peasant product, even though most of what was exported was not actually grown by peasants themselves. There were three main "systems" of coffee production. Forest production, accounting for about 60 percent of the coffee marketed was by far the largest; this was coffee which grew in the wild in large forest areas, but it was mostly the peasantry which harvested and brought the product to the market. Peasant coffee groves, maintained by rural households in Sidamo and Harrar provinces mainly, accounted between 30 to 35 percent of the crop marketed. The rest came from modern or quasi-modern coffee plantations owned and managed by private entrepreneurs.

Table 1.3: Exports by Value 1972, 1952

1972		1952	
% Total Exports		% Total Exports	
Coffee	48	Coffee	51.8
Oil Seeds	14	Oil Seeds	11.7
Hides/Skins	12	Hides/Skins	14.8
Livestock Prod.	8	Cereals	14.9
Legumes/Veg.	8	Other	6.8
Other	10		
Total	100		100

Source: CSO 1975; USDA 1956.

In the early 1970s, coffee's share of export earnings fell below 50%, while those of legumes and oil seeds rose appreciably. By 1974, gross earnings from all exports had reached 238 million USD. Table 1.3 shows the composition of the country's exports in 1972, which seems to have been an average year, and 1952.

Policies, Plans and Prospects

The distinctive aspect of the country's agricultural policies during the Old Regime was that they were outward oriented, and this in two senses. First, international donor agencies, the World Bank and USAID in particular, had considerable influence in policy formulation. The major objectives and programmes of development were freely borrowed from these and to a lesser extent other members of the donor community. It is true that planners became increasingly conscious of the complexities of development problems and policy planning over the years, nevertheless, most of the ideas incorporated in the major policy programmes came from outside. Secondly, development policy relied heavily on financial and technical support from the donor community. In the early years of the Regime, in the 1950s and early '60s, the aim of policy was to improve agriculture's export potential and to boost foreign earnings. The idea that agricultural growth should also bring about improvements in the rural population's nutritional and living standards came later; the goal of social equity through expanded employment and redistribution of wealth emerged in full only on the eve of the fall of the Regime, at the time the Fourth development plan was being drafted. It should also be noted that agricultural policy was inconsistent, and until the last quarter of our period, decidedly biased against the peasant.

The idea of extension services to support agriculture came from USAID, and the first extension programme was started in 1954 through the Agency's initiative and as part of its agricultural training and assistance programme. The extension service, which was based at Alemaya College, was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture in 1963, and by 1965 its staff numbered a mere one hundred (Siira 1965). At the close of the decade, the service had not expanded appreciably; the field personnel had grown to 125 regulars and 75 specialists deployed in coffee growing areas. At this time too, the Ministry of National Community Development fielded rural agents responsible for a variety of community development activities; these numbered about 350. In comparison, at the beginning of

the 1960s, Tanganyika, as it was called then, had an extension staff of over one thousand. On the other hand, EPID, which became responsible for all extension work, employed a total of 1020 field agents in 1974. If we add to this the considerable number of extension personnel deployed by what were called the comprehensive projects such as CADU, WADU, etc., it is evident that the 1970s and the changes in extension policy introduced by the end of the 60s (discussed below) brought about a dramatic development in extension services. The peasant was now actively being sought by the "development" state.

In the 1950s, agriculture was not considered important by decision-makers, and state budgetary allocations to the Ministry of Agriculture remained woefully low. In this decade too, extension services were limited in scope: the aim was to provide advice and information to the farming community, and the focus was mainly on livestock production (FAO/Huffnagel). Sheep breeding, cattle raising and poultry were emphasized with the goal of raising exports of wool, hides and skins and poultry products. In imitation of American farm experience, considerable effort was made to organize Farmer's Youth Clubs in the rural areas, whose main responsibility was to promote poultry production; by 1964, some 140 such Clubs were formed throughout the country (see USOM/E annual reports; Siira). It was only in the latter part of the 1960s, when extension services were revamped, that the focus of activity shifted to crop production and land use (thanks mainly to FAO and the World Bank). The idea that extension work should involve the distribution of yield-improving inputs to peasants and, along with this, improved farming practices - a shift away from the oral discussion of the previous period - was accepted and became part of government policy in 1967 (World Bank 1973, Vol. II).

There is no better way to examine the evolution of agricultural policy than through the various Five-Year Development Plans, which were the main instruments of development effort in the period under discussion. One can discern three main "doctrines" which came to play a significant role in shaping agricultural policy in the Plan periods of 1957-1974. The

first may be described as benign neglect of peasant agriculture, the second as alienation from it and the active promotion of large-scale commercial farms, and the third a swing in favour of small farms and peasant enterprise.

The Five-Year Plans

The First Five Year Development Plan, which was to run from 1957 to 1961 (IEG 1956), laid heavy emphasis on building up the country's infrastructure. Priorities in investment were given to transport, communication and energy; service posts and education also got considerable support. Agriculture in general was at the lowest end of the scale of priorities. It was believed, though without solid evidence, that growth in food production had kept slightly above population growth in the first half of the 1950s, and was expected to do the same in the plan period without much support. The main stumbling block here was that peasant agriculture was an unknown quantity since no serious attempt had been made to conduct field surveys and to collect useful information. Some support was offered in the area of coffee production and livestock breeding with the aim of improving the country's foreign earnings.

In each of the three Plans the agricultural sector received the least investment in comparison with the other major sectors. In the First Plan it received 8, in the Second 17 and in the Third 11 percent of total investment allocations. The lion's share in all cases went to transport, communications, energy and utilities. The manufacturing sector fared much better in relative terms, receiving investment allocations of 11, 22 and 20 percent respectively in each of the Plans.

The Second Five-Year Development Plan (1963-67) is distinctive because it was here that the decisive turn in favour of agricultural modernization was made (IEG 1962); this shift away from smallholder agriculture and in favour of mechanization was to be the guiding doctrine for the next decade. The argument at the time was that modernization was necessary to achieve higher rates of growth; but modernization was also seen as providing a strong stimulus to peasant agriculture. The

modern sector of agriculture was to be responsible for producing industrial crops, but was also to serve as the centre for the "demonstration and dissemination" of efficient methods of farming to the peasantry. The goals for peasant agriculture remained modest, namely, to increase cereal production for domestic consumption, and to improve production of exportable commodities such as coffee and livestock. Of the total monetary investment earmarked for agriculture in the plan period, the peasant sector received only ten percent, commercial agriculture 53 percent, and manpower and resource inventory the rest. Moreover, agriculture as a whole received less investment allocation than each of the major economic sectors, although in relative terms the investment allocated to it was higher than in the previous Plan. Here the "propulsive sectors", as they were called, were identified as mining, manufacturing and power.

Where precisely the idea of agricultural modernization originated and how it came to be so strongly endorsed by policy makers is an interesting question. It is evident that the chief influence was US advisors who were involved in a variety of programmes which later shaped government thinking. Certainly, the early staff reports of Alemaya College reflect a strong bias in favour of mechanization and large-scale enterprise, and of American methods of farm management (USOM/E 1955, 1956). Most mission and evaluation reports commissioned by USAID in the 1960s were quite positive about the prospects of commercial agriculture (SRI 1969d, USDA 1969). In support of earlier USAID positions, the SRI report insisted that there were few alternatives to agricultural modernization, and recommended that policy should strongly support what it called a "corporate development" strategy which would offer priority to commercial agriculture and agro-industrial enterprises, and to medium to small farms that produced mainly for the export market. The World Bank was equally positive about the policy of modernization (World Bank 1967), calling it an "effective strategy" and a "sound approach to development" (World Bank 1970, Vol. II), and later recommending greater investments in mechanization and modernization (1972).

The Third Five Year Plan (1968-1974), the last plan to be

implemented in our period, is significant for two main reasons (IEG 1968). First, partly as a result of the strong donor support it had received, partly due to some successes in the plantation and agro-industrial schemes in the Awash Valley, the Plan enthusiastically endorsed commercial agriculture. Modernization was seen as the catalyst that would accelerate agricultural growth, which in turn would rapidly improve the country's export performance; it was also felt that commercial agriculture's impact on the economy as a whole would be immediate and effective. The case for mechanization was strengthened as pessimism about peasant agriculture reached a high point in the late 1960s (: 189-90). As in previous plans, agriculture received the lowest investment allocation relative to the other major sectors, but once again the distribution of investment within agriculture itself was heavily weighted in favour of commercial farms which received 58 percent of development allocations and the peasant sector only ten percent. Secondly, the Plan made concessions to the peasant sector, and approved a programme of extended support to small-holder production; this came to be known as the package programme, and consisted first of the comprehensive or integrated package approach, and later of the minimum package service.

The most dramatic reversal of government thinking on agricultural development occurred, first quietly and tentatively in 1971, then boldly and aggressively in 1973, at the time when the Fourth Five Year Development Plan was being drafted. In a short paper in 1971, the planners broached the idea of reversing the order of priorities accorded to the modern and peasant sectors of agriculture (IEG 1971). The document went so far as to suggest that smallholder agriculture be given as much support as large-scale agriculture. But it was in 1973 that the re-ordering of priorities was placed on the agenda. There was widespread consensus (but how that consensus was arrived at is not clear) among policy planners that the goal of development should not be merely quantitative growth but must also involve the improvement of living standards and the equitable distribution of wealth. The objective of the new Plan (which was not completed) was to ensure "that the benefits of social

and economic development are ever more equitably distributed among the population" (PCO 1973a: I.8). The most important policy innovation with regard to the strategy of agricultural development was to be two fold: a) there was to be greater emphasis on the development of small-holder agriculture; commercial agriculture was relegated to a less significant status; and b) an integrated rural development programme was to be set up in the framework of awraja self-administration. The legislation for local administration at the awraja level was approved in 1966 though no practical steps were taken to set up the necessary institutions.

The idea of integrated rural development came first from ILO which had been asked to advise the government on projects for rural employment, and which strongly recommended integrated rural development schemes as a solution to rural unemployment (ILO 1970; Blaug 1974). ILO's arguments were deceptively simple, and the solution it proposed appeared at least affordable. It estimated that the rural labour force would grow by a high rate, and rural unemployment would soar even if employment opportunities were opened up rapidly in the modern sector of the economy, which it saw as unlikely. Blaug, the head of the second ILO Employment Mission which came to advise the government in 1972/73, strongly argued that the reduction of "rural unemployment by agricultural development rather than by the development of manufacturing in urban centres has become a prime policy objective in most developing countries". Integrated rural development programmes were the only solution to provide employment opportunities to the rural population on a sufficiently large scale. Such programmes would take advantage of the minimum package services, promote local participation by integrating themselves with peasant self-help schemes, and enable the development of local resources.

The new strategy, which was set out in series of documents distributed for discussion in 1973 (PCO 1973a, 1973b) recognized that though inefficient by "modern standards", peasant agriculture nonetheless was the most significant sector of the rural economy and held better prospects in the long run

than modern agriculture. There is sufficient evidence, planners argued, that small farmers "utilize their cropped areas more intensively and frequently realize higher yield per hectare" (PCO 1973a: III-11) than large-scale farmers. With greater extension support, more reliance on green technology, and expanded credit services, smallholder agriculture could become the main force in rural development. The added advantage here, it was believed, was that peasant agriculture would absorb a high percentage of the rural labour force that would otherwise remain outside the development process. Not only was large-scale agriculture NOT offering comparable employment opportunities, it was displacing tenant and poor peasants and thereby compounding the unemployment problem. The key concept for the forthcoming Fourth Plan was thus greater emphasis on small farm development, and greater assistance to the peasant sector (1973b: Annex II).

The master strategy for invigorating smallholder agriculture was to be integrated rural development, which was to consist of four broad programmes: a) spreading the seed-fertilizer technology through the accelerated expansion of MPP; b) mass adult education aimed at extending literacy/numeracy, and agricultural and vocational training; c) labour intensive rural public works to develop infrastructure, and provide rural employment; and d) expansion of basic health services to the peasantry. The new policy was not only strongly peasant oriented but also sought to "penalize" commercial agriculture, the darling of the two earlier Plans. It recommended the abolition of tax exemptions and fiscal incentives that owners and operators of large farms had benefited from since the mid-1960s. It recommended that new civil infrastructure projects in the rural areas should be constructed to serve in the main smallholder enterprises (1973a: Ch. III).

The Package Programmes

The comprehensive package approach refers to large, multi-purpose and integrated development operations such as CADU, which was started in 1967 with Swedish aid, and WADU,

which was set up in 1970 with IDA/World Bank assistance. A third comprehensive project, the Ada District Development Project (ADDP) was launched with USAID support in 1972. Other multi-purpose programmes included HADP (Humera Agricultural Development Project), TAHADU (Tach Adiabo and Hadekti Agricultural Development Unit in Tigray), and SORADEP (Southern Regional Agricultural Development Project serving the central Rift Valley areas). There were also several low profile, integrated programmes run by government agencies other than MoA in several parts of the country. The main objectives of the programmes were the following: to provide peasants easy access to modern inputs; to promote better farming techniques and farm implements; to organize peasants into cooperatives enabling them better access to credit; to expand normal extension services; to improve marketing facilities and prices for peasant produce; and to build rural public works such as feeder roads, water projects and environmental protection schemes. Let us briefly examine CADU, the most successful of all the comprehensive programmes (on WADU see MoA 1973, esp. Vol. I).

It is worth noting that the Southeast Asian experience in integrated rural development served as a model for CADU. The "intensive agricultural district" programmes in India, and more importantly the Comilla multi-purpose project in what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) were the main inspiration behind the project when it was being prepared by its Swedish planners. Later, some CADU staff visited both programmes, returning with favourable impressions (Sida 1966; CADU 1969). At the time the project was being put together, the World Bank and FAO were preparing to put before the Ethiopian authorities an integrated approach to rural development based on the widespread use of green revolution innovations, and Sida planners freely borrowed some of their ideas (Sida: 111). *It is thus not an exaggeration to say that CADU was designed and launched without serious investigation of local peasant experiences, agricultural needs and development priorities. The planners in fact did not know until the project document was completed where the project was to be located;*

it was then that the government offered Sida half a dozen or so project sites in different agro-ecological zones to choose from.

Most evaluations of CADU show that the programme was on the whole a success but just how successful it was remains a bone of contention⁷. Nevertheless, the all-round impact of the project on the Chilalo peasantry has not to my knowledge been fully investigated. Instead, CADU and Sida officials on the one hand, and outside investigators on the other were eager to demonstrate the benefits of the project in terms solely of income and productivity improvements. However, as no reliable base value of incomes, production or yield in Chilalo before the project was launched was available, and as the various surveys on these issues were conducted in different localities thus making comparison difficult, measuring economic improvements came to involve a good amount of speculation and guess-work. We shall return to the problem of productivity further down, let us first consider the issue of improvements in income.

The project office estimated in the early 1970s that average peasant income in the project area grew by E\$ 75 annually since 1968 (CADU 1971a: 4). Holmberg (1973) who made a serious effort to measure income and consumption levels in the area, came to the conclusion that mean annual income in Etheya, a relatively well-endowed and prosperous area which was a beneficiary of CADU from the very beginning, was about E\$ 1618 in 1971/72, and that the median income of peasants here had doubled in the four years of CADU activity (:88-89). Cohen (1974), on the other hand, suggests that a participating household in Chilalo working about 6 hectares of farm land may have increased its income annually by E\$ 200 to 300, while Tesfai Teclé (1975) argues that the average income of a "middle peasant" in Chilalo increased from E\$ 314 in 1966 to E\$ 883 in 1971 (: 56). Despite these seeming improvements in income, however, EPID noted that the amount of rural tax collected from Chilalo awraja (i.e. land, income,

⁷ CADU has been extensively evaluated; some of the main works are Cohen; Holmberg; Stahl 1974; Tesfai Teclé.

health etc. taxes) declined annually between 1967 and 1971; similarly, tax assessment also showed a decline in these years (EPID 1974b: 82). In contrast, there is strong evidence that the number of overall beneficiaries grew considerably over the years reaching its peak in the mid-1970s, and that a good deal of rural infrastructure was constructed in the area.

Let us now consider the project's main areas of failure. It is my opinion that CADU failed to promote innovative farming practices that were not dependent on costly modern inputs. Its effort to popularize new technical equipment like the moldboard plough, the harrow and the ox-cart was by and large unsuccessful (*vid.* Gill 1976). But the most serious failure of the project lay in the social consequences of its activities in Chilalo. In the first place, the main beneficiaries were the more prosperous peasants and those with secure tenure arrangements. The poor and a majority of the tenantry benefited the least. The issue of social equity came to weigh heavily on the main donor, Sida, which exerted considerable effort to have the government pass legislation to relieve the burden of those with insecure tenures who were unable because of it to benefit from CADU programmes. Secondly, considerable peasant evictions from the land took place in the area particularly in the period when CADU was most active and when its programmes were beginning to pay off. Thirdly, the package of innovations offered to the participating peasantry was highly dependent on external economies, and consequently, from a cost-benefit point of view what was achieved would not in the long run be worth the cost or sustainable.

The second strategy of rural development promoted by the government in the period 1968-1974 was the minimum package programme (MPP) which was designed to reach a greater number of peasants, and which eventually was believed to lead to agricultural transformation. The idea for the MPP came from the World Bank (with support from FAO) towards the end of the 1960s (World bank 1970, Vol. II). FAO's Freedom from Hunger Campaign had been conducting fertilizer trials in various parts of the country since 1965, and the results were said to be very encouraging. Moreover, both donors were

of the opinion even from the start that the comprehensive programmes were far too costly to be extended to the mass of the peasantry and to serve as a viable vehicle for rural development on a large scale. These were the main reasons for the concept behind the MPP. The Bank seems to have had no difficulty convincing Ethiopian agricultural experts and officials to try it on a limited scale. The objective was to provide peasants a select number of "proven innovations" (such as fertilizers, high yield seeds, etc.) which were believed to possess high impact capability. These innovations were to be introduced first in high potential areas, and, with greater success and peasant participation, to other areas eventually. It was believed that these innovations would have immediate results in the form of high output, high yield and increased income for peasants. This was the green revolution dressed up in Ethiopian garb. The World Bank was quite enthusiastic about the prospects, believing that a real agricultural transformation was possible in the framework of smallholder production and at a modest and affordable cost to the country (World Bank 1973, Vol. II).

The minimum package programme, administered through EPID, a unit within MoA, became operational in the latter part of 1971. FAO's fertilizer programme was integrated into the MPP soon after EPID was established. EPID's task from the very beginning was ambitious. It was responsible for the distribution of modern inputs (fertilizers, improved seeds, and crop protection chemicals), the dissemination of technical innovations and better methods of crop management, and the organization of cooperatives for credit and purchasing services. The methods employed for the dissemination of innovations were rather conventional, and were borrowed from the Asian experience. They consisted of demonstration to farmers of new techniques and inputs, selection of what were called model farmers to spearhead the adoption process, and advise and verbal exhortation by dedicated but inexperienced extension agents in the field⁸. Field agents worked in what were called ex-

⁸ Based on EPID 1970, 1972, 1974b,c. See also Schulz 1976; Stahl 1973; and Tesfai Teclé. For detailed discussion of MPP strategy and administration see EPID 1972; for criticisms EPID 1974b.

tension areas, five of which made up a minimum package area or MPPA, which catered on the average to about 10,000 peasant beneficiaries. In the nature of things, almost all the extension areas (some 250 had been set up by 1974) were located in communities served by the major road networks. The input approach -for such was the green revolution Ethiopian style- was heavily dependent on modern transport services. Moreover, until 1975, EPID relied on fertilizer as its main innovation, and for a variety of reasons, it was unable to provide high-yield seeds or crop-protection chemicals.

By 1974, EPID had reached only 50,000 beneficiaries. Total fertilizer sales increased from 946 MT in 1970/71 to 6724 MT in 1973/74; improved seed sales rose from 22 MT to 123 MT in the same period (EPID 1975B: 14). At the end of 1974, extension work in all its forms (i.e. MPP, the comprehensive approach and others) had reached about 16 percent of the estimated farming population. In the second phase of EPID, i.e. 1975-1980, the aim was to extend the programme to involve about 25 percent of peasant households in the country; by the end of this period, namely, after ten years of operations, the average income of participating households was expected to increase by 25 to 40 percent.

EPID and the integrated programmes did register some significant successes; for example, promising improvements in output and productivity were observed and a dynamic peasant sector began to emerge as a consequence in Arssi, and southern and southwestern Shoa where the new programmes had been tried out the longest. Cohen, who earlier was a critic of the programmes (1975), but later became an enthusiastic supporter of the integrated approach, has ranked CADU among the best known development projects in the world, comparable to the famous models in Mexico and India (1987: 14-15), but this is an exaggeration. The government itself rejected the CADU approach in the end saying it was too costly to replicate elsewhere.

EPID and the MPP approach had inherent limitations. The input approach as it came to be practiced here did not employ novel methods, and did not take into account the experi-

ence of the peasant, the farming system in use, or the property structure in force. It did not attempt to introduce a more dynamic and more resilient farming system; the modernization of peasant agriculture was to consist solely of supplying modern inputs, in practice mostly fertilizer. The modern in other words was to be grafted on the traditional. When drought struck in the third year of the programme, MPP beneficiaries as well as non-beneficiaries became equally vulnerable, and EPID, unable to meet the challenge in a novel way, turned itself into a relief agency through the initiative of FAO and other donors (EPID 1974a, 1975a). Secondly, the input approach inevitably led to greater dependency on external economies, on the one hand, and growing government subsidies on the other. By 1974, EPID came to the realization that there was an urgent need to diversify its extension package in the light of sharply rising fertilizer costs. More non-chemical inputs and improved farming practices were some of the options it began to seriously consider (EPID 1974c: 6). But the most significant shortcoming of the programme had to do with the effectiveness of the innovations themselves on the one hand, and the distortions caused by the existing property system on the other.

From the very beginning, the impact of fertilizers and improved seeds was considerably exaggerated, and what the World Bank called "proven innovations" were proven not really in the context of peasant practices in Ethiopia but elsewhere in the Third World. The green revolution requires a variety of basic infrastructures (including water management and irrigation schemes), very few of which were in place during the implementation of the new programmes. High yield seeds, for example, perform better under irrigation, but Ethiopia is water-deficient, and its surface and underground water sources are either insufficient for large-scale irrigated agriculture or the investment necessary to promote such a venture is prohibitive. EPID's own evaluation of the impact of fertilizer on crop yield revealed some surprising results (EPID 1974b: 20 ff). Except for maize, fertilized fields showed a yield difference of between 30 and 40 percent, too small to make a significant difference in income, taking into account the cost of the input, the time and

trouble of obtaining, transporting and storing it by the peasant. CADU's experience is similar: the difference in crop yield between fields using green revolution and traditional inputs is 50 percent or less (CADU 1972, 1975a). It has been shown elsewhere in this country, including WADU trials in the 1970s, that a yield response of less than 60 to 70 percent cannot be physically seen in the field by the average peasant; and peasants are more willing to try fertilizers if the yield response is clearly visible. EPID's conclusion was that for peasants growing small-stalk crops, using fertilizer was not of great benefit. Table 1.4 presents comparative figures for crop yield from EPID and CADU surveys.

Table 1.4: Yield Figures for Selected Crops With and Without Modern Inputs

Crops	(Quintals/Hectare)		Fertilized	
	EPID	CADU	EPID	CADU
Barley	10.1	16.5	13.3	20.5*
Teff	8.0	12.1	10.9	16.0
Sorghum	19.0	-	23.0	-
Maize	43.8	27.1	64.8	32.5
Wheat	10.6	16.2	14.9	22.6*

Source: EPID 1974b; CADU 1975.

Note: *High yield varieties were used; all the rest are local varieties in both CADU and EPID trials.

Moreover, the incremental income obtained from using fertilizer was dependent not just on the rate of crop yield but also on the price of the input itself. EPID argued that higher fertilizer prices to farmers would negate productivity gains, and advised the government to be prepared to offer price subsidies on fertilizers to support MPP beneficiaries. Without such subsidies, or exceptionally high grain prices, the use of green technology inputs would be unprofitable to all class of farmers (EPID 1974b: 22-25).

Judged from the standpoint of social equity, the package programmes were clearly a failure. The "proven" innovations

went mostly to small landlords and owner-cultivators; poor peasants and tenant farmers were largely left out. According to EPID (1974b: 71), some 85 percent of input sales went to owners, and only five percent to tenants. The CADU experience is also similar: more landowners benefited from its services than share-croppers or poor peasants (CADU 1971). The method of input distribution in fact favoured owners and discriminated against tenants, who were obliged to show written contracts from their landlords to be eligible for credit and other services - a practice which was discontinued in 1974 following concerted complaints by donors and technical advisors. Small landowners and "rich" peasants often dominated the cooperatives that were the main channel of credit and related services. The cooperative movement in any event was slow: from 1966, when the cooperative legislation was approved, to 1974 not more than one hundred cooperative societies managed to obtain their registration. The average peasant was not quite aware of the benefits of cooperatives and lacked the skills to set them up to the satisfaction of the authorities.

Moreover, both the MPP and the comprehensive programmes gave rise to peasant evictions on a large scale. Landlords who adopted the new innovations, or wished to turn their land into commercial enterprises removed the tenantry on their property in short notice. The experience was similar in Arssi, the Ada area, and the southwestern parts of the country. Moreover, the input approach discriminated against all peasants who did not live close to the road network. An extension area was where the inputs and the agents were and such areas had to be in a location served by a road; it was designed to reach peasants along the road and ten to fifteen kilometers on each side of it. Thus extension touched only those peasants on or within a short radius of an all weather road; all others who were only accessible by animal transport were left out (see Map 2 at the end of this volume). In the early 1970s some 70 percent of rural households were not accessible by road. Finally, EPID was a bureaucratic organization, had insufficient trained manpower, and was hurt by delays and inefficiencies in operations. The cost of the agency was also high: some 50 percent of the

EPID budget was spent on staff salaries and office expenses. This may be considered reasonable in comparison to the comprehensive programmes such as WADU where staff and office expenses ate up 90 percent of the agency's budget.

The package programmes were not a resounding success but they were not total failures either. They did raise the problem of rural development in a way different from earlier doctrines, and focused attention on peasant producers, their potentials and limitations. I believe this, more than anything else, is their success story. Indeed, in some areas and among some peasant groups the green revolution did show considerable potential. In the first half of the 1970s, for example, successful peasants involved in the CADU programme had an average cereal yield of 20 quintals per hectare or more, and this is equal to or better than yield levels achieved by the average south Asian peasant in the same period and for the same category of crops (see FAO 1987: 17-18). The green revolution, we should note, had a much longer history in Asia than in this country.

The programmes however aroused considerable controversy; in particular advisors from Sweden, the country which contributed heavily both to EPID and CADU, took a very critical position, while others were on the whole quite positive. The controversy is too involved and there is no need for us to reproduce it here (see Dessalegn 1986 for some of the literature). One of the most persistent critics of the programme was Michael Stahl (1973, 1974) who argued that the package approach benefited the rich and not the poor, led to the eviction of tenants, and strengthened the position of the landed classes in the rural areas. He does however admit, somewhat grudgingly, that the programme was beneficial to some needy peasants who managed to participate in it long enough. Quite the opposite view was taken by an Ethiopian specialist who evaluated the programme on the eve of the revolution (Tesfai Teckle 1975). His verdict was that the MPP was a success while the integrated projects were too expensive to sustain or duplicate elsewhere in the country. The MPP, he thought, recorded major achievements in the first phase of its operation. Many experts believe, he pointed out, "that Ethiopia has so

far been fortunate in developing a rather simple technological package ... that is widely applicable" (: 90). The World Bank, on the other hand, was over-enthusiastic about the success of the input-based approach implemented by EPID (World Bank 1975a: 41-42). The application of fertilizers, it noted in one of its policy papers, has been so successful as to convince Ethiopian peasants of their usefulness without much persuasion by extension personnel. It attributed the rapid adoption of modern inputs to the following factors: a) a first class technical package offered to peasants; b) sufficient respected community people prepared to act as model farmers without payment; c) a "land tenure system which does not discourage production above subsistence level"; and d) a loose system of credit. It suggested, moreover, that the MPP was uniquely suited to Ethiopian conditions. There are, it pointed out, "few examples of this type of national program, despite its considerable advantage for countries with limited resources and massive rural poverty. Social and economic stratification in many South Asian countries, for example, would seem to preclude widespread application of the minimum package approach." Needless to say, the Bank's enthusiasm was not fully supported by the evidence that both EPID and the older comprehensive programmes had accumulated over the years.

Plans and Achievements

How much was accomplished and what advances were made in nearly two decades of development planning? This is of course a difficult question to answer, and the conclusions I am offering here are my own and subject to debate.

In the area of agricultural production in general, the achievements were quite modest. Measured in quantitative terms employing conventional indices (such as output, productivity, etc), or in terms of food security and nutritional adequacy, the agricultural record of the Old Regime is more than disappointing. Assessments provided in official documents point out that agricultural growth fell below the targets set for it, and often below population growth in each of the three plan peri-

ods; that outside the MPP areas productivity was either stagnant or growing at unsatisfactory rates, and that the structural impediments to improved production grew more burdensome, not less (Ministry of Planning 1967b, PCO 1973b). There are however some bright spots in the general picture, namely, that agriculture would have fared even worse had it not received the modest level of support it did in the years since the early 1960s. Perhaps of greater significance is the fact that a considerable number of rural producers became increasingly aware that modern inputs and new forms of cultivation could improve their output and their income, and that the road to "modernization" did not necessarily lead to the tractor, the harvester, and the displacement of the poor. Those peasants who were fortunate enough to benefit from the package programmes (rich peasants, small landowners, the "kulak") were setting a pace which if it had become widespread would have given rise to a dynamic peasant sector with great potential.

It should be noted in passing that viewed in regional terms, the south benefited more than the north from the various agricultural programmes implemented during the life of the Old Regime. For reasons that we cannot have space to discuss here, policy planners favoured the south more than the north. By the close of the period under discussion, regional disparities had a distinctive north/south profile, though there were some significant exceptions – i.e. economic regions that did not fit this scheme. The involutionary process noted at the outset of this chapter was more evident in the northern provinces of Wollo, Tigrai, Eritrea and eastern Begemidr. In contrast, the areas showing good prospects and undergoing considerable improvements were Arssi province, and the south-central and south-western regions where the package programmes were heavily concentrated and where resources endowments were generally better (see Map 2).

If one was to point to one critical bottleneck which impeded the successful implementation of the three Plans it would have to be the structure of landholding which gave the agrarian order of the time an inflexible character (Dessalegn 1984, Ch. 2 for a brief discussion). In the Second, but more so

the Third Plans, a strong case was made for far reaching land reform, without which, it was argued, progress in all sectors of the agrarian economy would be blocked. But no such reform was ever attempted, and the half-hearted tenancy reform, which the government finally managed to submit to Parliament in the early 1970s, never made it into the law books. It may be worth noting in this connection that of the two major donors involved in the country's agriculture, USAID was not convinced of the need for land reform (*vid* Miller) while the World Bank was lukewarm about it (World Bank 1975b).

Indeed, while policy planners and political activists were demanding radical land redistribution, the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration (MLRA), which was set up in 1966, was quietly promoting resettlement (or land settlement as it was then called) as a viable alternative. The history of resettlement in this period is quite involved, and to keep within the space available to us in this Chapter we shall make only a brief comment on it (see Dessalegn 1989 for details). The major assumption within MLRA and among its expatriate advisors was that vast and unutilized resources - as much as 12 million hectares according to some estimates - were held by the government in the form of state-domain land. These resources could easily be distributed to land-hungry peasants and those with insecure holdings. Land settlement had a double-edged objective: it was seen as relieving the population pressure in the northern provinces, and as a means of distributing under-utilized land to the poor and the landless. It was in other words a resettlement programme as well as a land reform measure, and, in this latter guise, was meant to reassure the landed classes that their property and economic power in the rural areas was not in danger. By the time the Old Regime was overthrown, however, resettlement had been tried on a limited scale with mixed results; on the other hand, the landed classes must have come to regret, specially on the eve of the revolution, their stubborn resistance to the land and tenancy reform initiatives proposed in the past, many of which were mild enough not to have threatened their power and property, which the revolution duly swept away without anyone shedding a tear.

Conclusion

We now have to ask ourselves: why did peasant agriculture in the Old Regime fail to make a decisive turn-around, to transform itself (or be transformed) into a dynamic system of production? How do we explain the agricultural stagnation of the country, and the involution of peasant production in most parts of the central and northern highlands? What were the odds favouring capitalist development, either smallholder or large-scale, in the rural economy?

A brief review of the literature may help us place these questions in perspective. In the general debate on the economic and social backwardness of this country, the earliest and the most common explanation was cultural and social-psychological. Highland Ethiopian culture, it was argued, is a confining one, resistant to change and even reactionary. Social and inter-personal relations are based on strong traditional values that promote unquestioned acceptance of authority and hierarchic order on the one hand, and inter-personal rivalry on the other. Individuals are wont to seek their own short-term self-interest, and success is based on manipulation of others rather than personal achievement. Secretiveness and withholding of information is said to be customary. Ethiopian culture, we are told, is defined by the wax-and-gold syndrome, i.e. by ambiguity and equivocation, and is opposed to the rationalist ethos of modern societies (Levine 1965, Kortten 1972). The weight of tradition inhibits the search for new ideas or new methods of work; indeed, tradition as codified in religious practice often defines the conditions of labour and the forms of employment. In my view, such cultural theses are seriously flawed for at the heart of their argument is the highly subjective proposition that all cultures which are not informed by western values are backward.

More relevant to us may be what I call the single-factor explanation of backwardness. The factors that are often singled out are insufficiency of modern infrastructure in the rural areas, market dependency, peasant inadequacy (ignorance, back-

ward farming methods, etc.), and the land tenure system. The World Bank has been the most persistent advocate of heavy investment in rural transport. The lack of adequate transport services, it is believed, has been a principal constraint in the movement of food grain from surplus to deficit areas and has contributed to the food supply deficiency in the country (Fekadu and Phillips 1972). More significantly, the restricted movement of agricultural produce and of people has underdeveloped the rural market system, making it play a less vigorous role in peasant production than it would have if the opposite was the case. The greater market integration of the peasant, it is argued, the greater the chances for a shift from a subsistence economy which now define the logic of peasant production to a market (i.e. capitalist) economy.

Up until the beginning of the 1970s, policy planners blamed peasant inadequacy for the lack of progress in agriculture. We have dealt with the subject sufficiently earlier and there is no need to repeat the arguments here. Cohen's political-economy approach links together peasant inadequacy, the land system and other factors to explain agricultural stagnation (1987: 45-46). He argues that without significant reforms, the rural sector would continue to be an impediment to development, but serious reforms were blocked by the alliance of urban elites and the landed classes. Modernization was thus frustrated by a combination of class forces on the one hand, and an exploitive property arrangement on the other.

Then there are the neo-Malthusians, whose explanation of long term agricultural decline shifts the argument to demography and technology. The simplest neo-Malthusian position sees accelerated population growth and declining land resources as being responsible for pushing the already vulnerable agrarian sector to the brink of disaster (Robinson and Yamazaki 1986). However, the agrarian history of the regions defined by the *enset* culture provides some interesting contrasts, of which the following are note-worthy: a) it is possible to contain the demographic pressure or minimize its impact by such adaptive mechanisms as intensive cultivation, more and better use of resilient crops, and by planting cultivars that promote

economy of land use; and b) high population pressure is not incompatible with environmentally responsible farming practices (see Dessalegn 1990b; 1992; Jackson; and Jackson et al.). The *enset* zone has managed to sustain a much higher density of population than the cereal zone, and has had fewer famine experiences.

For a fresh approach, we need to turn from political economy and demography to sociology and class relations. The following are my working premises: a) If we leave aside for the moment the inchoate capitalist farmer of the late 1960s and early 1970s (see below), we may say that the agrarian class structure of the country remained unchanged for perhaps a century, until of course the collapse of the imperial regime. No intermediate class or social strata appeared between the lord and the peasant, both of whom were "frozen" within the existing system; they were content, in other words, to maintain the existing social and economic relations. One strong evidence for this is the dearth of peasant uprisings, which are often taken as indicators of the nature of class relations and of class tensions at a given time. Moreover, as noted above, neither lord nor peasant actively sought technological changes or changes in the methods of production. Technology, it should be stressed does not change unless there is a class or social force which needs better technology and is able to use it profitably. In brief we are referring to social stagnation as a critical factor in agricultural involution. b) Tied to this is a second factor, namely that the land system and the ensemble of social relations built on it further discouraged innovative endeavour or the emergence of innovative elements. With the exceptions to be noted below, peasant society was not sharply differentiated. I believe differentiation would have had a healthy impact on the agrarian economy. c) Peasant society was insufficiently integrated into the international market or the world system. I am not of course arguing that population pressure, and/or resource insufficiency were irrelevant to the questions under discussion; they have had a significant impact, but the primacy accorded them by the neo-Malthusians and others is I believe misplaced. Let me deal with the last premise first.

As was indicated earlier, the peasant sector was the main source of export earnings, contributing four-fifth or more of the country's exports. This dominant position remained unchanged all through the life of the Old Regime. But it would be an exaggeration to say that for this reason the peasantry was integrated into the world market. Peasant products were channeled to European or American markets mainly through the agency of the export merchant. For the majority of peasants, the local market was far more significant than the world market, and the logic of peasant production centered on self-sustenance and the preservation of existing standards of life. The few industrial goods the peasant purchased from the market were either mostly produced in-country, could easily be substituted by the products of the indigenous craft industry, or were insignificant in so far as the world market was concerned. Then as well as today, salt, sugar, cheap textile products, edible oil and kerosene were mostly what peasants bought from the local market.

Relations between the landed classes and the subordinate peasantry remained for the most part traditional all through the Old Regime. The chief method of surplus extraction viz. rent in kind and labour services, was neither suitable for capital accumulation nor conducive to improved production. The absence of long-term contractual arrangements between the lord and the tenant, which was the norm, discouraged investments on the land or experiments in new methods of production. Though the evidence is lacking, there is good reason to believe that tenant holdings may have grown smaller from the end of the 1950s. Plot consolidation and enlarged operations were closed to *rist* holders in the north and owner-operators in the south due to the system of partible inheritance in which a father divided up his property among all his children at the time of his death. Subsistence agriculture is essentially polyculture, a practice that again encourages land fragmentation, and discourages crop specialization.

The package programmes, and certain forms of export agriculture invigorated a good number of small to medium operators. These elements came from the strata of small landown-

ers, of owner-operators, and those who worked their own land as well as land rented from others. It is interesting to note that commercial agriculture attracted not only farmers employing modern machinery but those using the ox-drawn plough. In areas like Ada district, and in the Rift Valley regions, small owners participated vigorously in the new agriculture, often evicting their tenants and operating their farms with traditional equipment. Small operators played just as a significant a role as large capitalist farmers in the rapid development of the Setit-Humera region. Some 42 percent of the cultivated area in the region was operated by ox-ploughing farmers and the rest by tractor operators in the early 1970s (Dessalegn 1986). In the period 1970-1973, AID Bank, which was the main source of credit for rural enterprises, made loans to commercial farmers worth Eth. \$ 18.9 million. In the same period, its loans to farmers' cooperatives totaled Eth. \$ 15.3 million, of which 92 percent was taken out by Humera small farmers' cooperatives (AID Bank 1974).

Owner-operators and owner-tenants were a force in the rural economy though we have no hard evidence to measure it. The latter peasants are especially interesting. While the evidence is patchy, one is tempted to view these peasants as enterprising spirits who acquired tenancy rights to earn more income even though their own plots do not seem to have been small (see MoA 1975: 61-68). Whether these two rural elements would have eventually emerged as the energetic force bearing the seeds of capitalism is of course an intriguing question, but in the given circumstances, and in the face particularly of the existing property structure, the prospects for such development would not have been easy.

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COMMERCIAL FARMING

The Failure of Agrarian Capitalism⁹

Large-scale mechanized agriculture (or commercial farming as it was often called) under the Old Regime attracted for a time far more attention than it deserved because decision-makers saw it as the dynamic force for rural transformation while liberal and radical observers attributed to it far more precocity than it actually possessed. The expansion of mechanized agriculture begins in the second half of the 1960s, picks up momentum towards the end of the decade, and was settling into a slow but steady pace in the early 70s when it was overtaken by events. By the time the Old Regime was overthrown, commercial agriculture had evolved to a stage where one could argue that a form of agrarian capitalism was emerging as a force in the countryside. Looked at objectively, there was inherently nothing "evil" about incipient rural capitalism, and that it was only he "moralists" who saw it as a destructive force, and warned of dire consequences¹⁰.

Mechanized Agriculture: An Attempt at an Inventory

By the close of the 1960s, mechanized agriculture had expanded considerably, and this expansion had taken place in three different forms: 1) Physical expansion: the number of commercial farms as well as the quantity of capital equipment employed grew at a sharp rate. This reflects both the encouragement given to mechanization by the government and the

⁹ Note to readers: this essay was written in the mid-1980s.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the criticism of mechanized agriculture, see Dessalegn 1986.

liberal investment climate created by it. 2) Regional expansion: from a few concessions and model farms in the Awash and Rift valleys, commercial agriculture spread to many parts of the country including the Setit region bordering on the Sudan. This coincides with the completion of a modest but important transportation and communication programme linking the center, Addis Ababa, with many parts of the periphery. 3) Product expansion: the early mechanized farms specialized in a few commercial crops -such as sugar cane, cotton and coffee -but by the beginning of the 70s a large variety of crops both for the domestic as well as the foreign market were being cultivated, of which cereals, pulses, sesame seed, pepper, fruit and vegetables were the most important. The full extent of mechanized agriculture will probably never be known mainly because the registration of large-scale farms as well as farm machinery, never strictly enforced to begin with, was carried on haphazardly, and by a variety of government departments, including *woreda* and *awraja* administrations, which makes a serious inventory now virtually impossible.

The government at the time did not restrict itself to creating the favorable climate for mechanization, it was itself actively involved in large-scale agriculture, and in fact some of the early mechanized farms were state enterprises. In the Rift Valley, the Ministry of National Community Development operated the Awassa and Arba Minch farms as well as a small coffee plantation in Kaffa; the combined area of all three in the early period was about 5000 hectares (ha). In the Middle Awash, both the Abadir and the Melka-Seddi-Amibara farms, with a total hectarage of 5000, were operated on behalf of the government's National Resources Development Agency, which also owned a small coffee plantation in Kaffa. Most of the state owned farms were, however, not in a healthy condition, and a number of foreign experts recommended that they be privatized as soon as possible.

Another stimulant to the expansion of large-scale agriculture was state concessions which were mostly provided to foreign companies and expatriate entrepreneurs. Of the former, the most well-known where HVA and Tendaho Plantations in

the Awash Valley, and a few plantations in Eritrea. Of the latter kind, there were over 560 family-run farms, most of them less than 100 ha in size, in central and western Eritrea. These farms, which measured collectively about 34000 ha, specialized in fruit and vegetable growing, and in dairy products and meat processing. We have excluded these from our discussion because they were really family enterprises that were operated with the minimal use of machinery and of hired labor.

The areas which most attracted the attentions of local investors as well as foreign capital were Arssi province, the Rift and Awash valleys, and the Setit Humera basin. In addition, there were pockets of mechanized farms in Bale, Harar, Kaffa, and Wollega provinces, and in the vicinity of Addis Ababa (mainly in Ada Woreda). A medium-size-commercial farm in Cheffa, south of Dessie in Wollo (area 2700 ha.) and a similar-sized farm north of the provincial capital stood as the lone exception to the general rule that large-scale agriculture shunned the regions where the "communal tenure" system was prevalent. Table 2.1 gives estimates of the total land area under mechanization in the country as a whole prior to 1975, the year of the land reform. The estimates are based on a variety of published and unpublished sources. Where such evidence is not available I have made my own estimation based on the number of tractors in the given area, and where such information is absent I have indulged in a bit of "intelligent guessing," which fortunately involves only as small area.

It is quite possible that a few small and large farms may have been overlooked, and a few hundred hectares of land may be missing from the total figure, nevertheless Table 2.1 is as much an accurate inventory as it is possible to present given the circumstances noted earlier. The area under mechanized agriculture thus constituted just about 2.3 percent of the total area under cultivation in the country as a whole. Furthermore, according to one official source, commercial agriculture contributed about seven percent to the gross value of agricultural production by the close of the 1960s (Burke and Thornely, Vol. II).

It is far more difficult to determine the number of trac-

tors and other agricultural equipment in the country in the same period. One set of figures given by the Ministry of Agriculture may serve as a good indicator.

Table 2.1: Total Land Area under Mechanization up to 1975

Region	Area in Hectares
Arssi province	32,000
Rift Valley	32,000
Awash Valley	52,000
Humera area	176,000
Others (inc. Ada, Bale, Cheffa, Kaffa, Harar, Wollega, etc.)	25,000
Total	317,000
Rounded to	320,000*

Note: Only mechanized, and not ox-ploughed farms have been included.

* The Ministry of Agriculture reported that between 1970 and 1972 about 565,000 ha of land was being cultivated by commercial farmers. This figure must have been arrived at by taking all the potentially arable land in Setit, about 20,000 ha as being under cultivation, which was not the case. (see *Addis Zemen*, 21 Tashsas 1966 E.C.)

According to the Ministry, there were, by 1970, some 1800 tractors in the hands of commercial farmers, but two years later, the figure stood at 3160 (*Addis Zemen*, 21 Tashsas 1966 E.C.).

Figures for other equipment are not available, but it is known that harvesting machines, for instance, were very few in number-perhaps not more than 100 in the country as a whole (see also CSO 1972 for distribution of tractors by province.)

Let us now look at some of the regions of intensive mechanized farming activity in some detail (we have been selective due to space limitations).

Arssi Province, particularly *Chillalo awraja*, contained the largest concentration of commercial farming of any province

in the country. There were many reasons why Arssi was found so alluring to large-scale farmers, but the two most important ones had to do with the agronomic prospects of the area, and the land tenure structure prevalent at the time. Endowed with a richly fertile soil, and a mild climate, Chillalo was particularly well suited to cereal production. Combined with this was the fact that a large portion of the province as a whole was held by big, often absentee, landlords, and by local gentry, which meant that vast areas could easily be converted to large-scale agriculture by evicting tenants. It was the combination of these two factors which made Arssi one of the fastest growing commercial agricultural areas in the country, second only to the Humera region.

There were two kinds of farmers in Arssi at the time: those who cultivated their own land, and those who rented land from others and who were generally known as "rental" farmers. This latter group often had other employment but doubled up as farmers for the quick profits that farming promised at the time. Rental farmers were common not only in this area but in Humera as well as other regions. According to one study, about 56 percent of the modern farmers in parts of Chillalo were owner cultivators, and 44 percent rental farmers (Henock 1972). Renting did not only involve land, but also agricultural equipment, and it was not uncommon for "entrepreneurs" to go to Arssi or other areas with nothing to their names, and become commercial farmers by renting both land and machinery.

In the early 1970s, Chillalo boasted about 126 commercial farmers who had among them a total of 23,000 ha of land under cultivation. There were also 184 tractors and 37 combines in the awraja. We do not have similar data about mechanized farming in the other two awrajas of the province, but we are told that there were 11 tractors in Ticho, and 60 in Arba Gugu awrajas during this same period (CADU 1973). Almost all modern farmers in the province cultivated cereals, particularly wheat, which in the early 1970s had a good domestic market. It is interesting that both in Arssi and Humera, and to some extent in the Rift Valley, there was another form of "contracting" in addition to the ones we have already men-

tioned. This involved individuals who owned tractors or other equipment, who themselves did not engage in cultivation but instead leased out their machinery to those who did in return for a fee. Thus the number of tractors in a given locality does not always give an accurate indication of the extent of large-scale farming in that locality. Unlike other areas, commercial farming was particularly profitable in Chillalo. One official source has estimated that the net return on a 120 ha. Mechanized farm here was about E.\$44,000 (EPID 1970).

The Rift Valley. The zones of intense mechanized activity in this region stretched from the Meqi river-Lake Zwai area, through the hinterlands of Shashemene and Awassa, past the Billate river basin, all the way to Arba Minch. Of the five major centers of commercial agriculture, the ones in the northern lake region of the valley, namely the Zwai, Shashemene and Awassa areas were by far the most important. The farms in the Billate area (including the tobacco estate run by the state owned Tobacco Monopoly), and those near Lake Abbaya and Arba Minch were all financially unsound and struggling hard to stay in business. One study has estimated that the area served by what was called SORADEP, i.e. the Southern Regional Agricultural Development Programme – an extension programme covering the Zwai and Shashemene regions, and the Awassa-Aletta Wondo area of northern Sidamo- contained over 150 commercial farmers and 20,000 ha of large-scale farming (Gillian 1974, also Stahl 1974). Most of the farms hugged the main highway extending from Modjo to Shashemene, and branching out here, one leading south to Awassa and Dilla, and the other south-west to Wollaita-Soddo and Arba Minch.

The crops that were frequently cultivated, mostly through rain fed agriculture although some irrigation was also employed, were maize, pulses (esp. haricot beans), sisal, vegetables and peppers, fruit and sorghum. By the end of the 1960s, the Awassa farm, the largest in the region, was transformed into an agro-industrial enterprise combining crop production with sisal processing, oil pressing, and food canning.

The Awash Valley. No agricultural and agro-industrial development project has aroused as much passion, attracted as much local and international attention, and been the subject of as many studies and surveys as the Awash river basin development project¹¹. The opponents of the development scheme saw in it dark and sinister designs and predicated disastrous consequences, while its supporters believed that the potential of the river basin was immense, and proper and phased development would yield handsome dividends for investors, the government as well as the inhabitants of the region. The flag carrier of the latter group was the AVA which was entrusted with the overall supervision of the development of the region; it was supported by FAO, UNDP, and other international aid agencies.

The Awash River flows from its humble origins, at Wellenkomi near Ambo, through three different ecological zones before it buries itself in Lake Abe in the Awssa Sultanate, after traveling leisurely some 1200 kms. One expert has stated that the Awash basin is the only river basin in the country which is suitable for large-scale irrigated development (Goudie). The area drained by the river and its tributaries covers some 70,000 sq. kms, of which the potentially irrigable land consists of at least 175,000 ha. By the beginning of the 1970s, some 52,000 ha of this land, i.e. nearly 30 percent of the total, had already been brought under cultivation, with the Qoqa dam serving to control the flow of water for all the concessions and estates strung along the valley. According to AVA's projections, the full irrigated development of the area, meaning the addition of 123,000 ha of cultivable land, was to be completed at a cost of E\$ 615 million by the early 1980s, a giant project which was to involve the construction of two more dams in the middle and lower valley.

The Awash basin was divided for developmental purposes into three regions corresponding roughly to the three ecological zones drained by the river. The Upper Valley extended

11 For some of the local and international studies see References in Harbeson. See also Bahru 1984, Bondestam 1974, Boyd 1973, FAO/UNDP 1975, Galpin 1973, Goudie 1972, Hogg 1972, Teshome 1983, Voelkner 1974.

from the Qoqa dam to the sugar plantation at Metehara. Much of this area is suitable for rain-fed as well as irrigated agriculture, and contained the largest concentration of concessions and large-scale estates in the region as a whole. The Middle Valley covered the area from Metehara up to the settlement town of Dubti, on the final bend of the river before it approaches the delta. This is basically a flat and desolate region with small clusters of settlements at flood points and tributary junctions, mainly in the upper belt. The Lower Valley – from Dubti to Lake Abe where the river finally vanishes – is the delta of the Awash, and consists basically of the Awassa fiefdom. A green and fertile area, with a string of small, shallow lakes, the Awash delta may be considered a jeweled oasis in the midst of desolation.

The following table gives a breakdown of the main holdings and irrigated plantations in the Valley as a whole as of the end of the 1960s. Harbeson, whose figures were based on later estimates, gives a slightly higher total for all the regions.

Table 2.2: Area Cultivated in the Awash Valley
(in ha.)

Upper Valley		Middle Valley		Lower Valley	
Farm	Area	Farm	Area	Farm	Area
Wonji	7000	Abadir	2800	Logia	140
Tibila	800	Metahara	4000	Dubti	6500
Nura Era	2600	Melka Sedi-		Dit Bahari	5560
Others	800	Amibara	2100	Assaita	-
		Awara Melka	560	Berga	18200
		Kessem-Kebena	400	Others	810
Total	11200	Total	9860		31210
All Farms Grand Total		52,270 hectares			

Source. AVA 1971; compare with Harbeson.

One cause for strong criticism of the Awash Valley development effort was the dominant position that foreign capital was seen to occupy. The sugar estate HVA (with plantations

in Wonji, Shoa and Metahara), and Tendaho Plantations stood out as giant foreign enterprises, holding between them 23,000 ha of land which was almost 44 percent of the total area under cultivation in the Valley. To these must be added the Nura Era estate as well as a few other farms in the Upper and Middle Valleys, almost all of which were medium sized concerns which specialized in growing fruit and vegetables. However, we should note also that there were a good number of enterprises operated by Ethiopian nationals. These enterprises, which were often small-to-medium in size, produced cereals, fruit and vegetables. The holding structure in the Valley was made more complex by the fact that the government itself was actively involved, either directly or through commissioned agents, in plantation development, settlement schemes, and experimental agricultural programmes (see Harbeson for this). What is suggested here is that despite the strong presence of foreign capital, the Awash Valley was not the exclusive preserve of multinational corporations.

The distribution of holdings in the Valley appears even more complicated if we look at it from the point of view of size and pattern of cultivation. In the first place, alongside the large concessions and medium estates, there were a considerable number of small, individually operated farms, most of whose owners were peasants from the highlands; these peasant cultivators were known as out growers, and produced commercial and industrial crops for the large estates such as cotton and sugar. According to AVA sources, 57 percent of the irrigated land under cultivation in the Awash basin was held by large-scale enterprises, i.e. those measuring 1000 ha and above, 10 percent by medium estates -ones measuring less than 1000 ha, and about 33 percent by out growers.

Secondly, more than half the available land in the Lower Valley was considered the property of the Awssa fiefdom, the Sultan of which had long exercised *de facto* jurisdiction over all land within what he believed was his territory. Bondestam, who is often in the habit of either ignoring the available evidence, or treating it in a cavalier fashion, has argued strongly that sultan Ali Mirra was "heavily involved in the transition of

Awssa to a capitalist state within Ethiopia." This was so because he and his agents had turned the sultanate into a gigantic, capitalist-operated plantation. The real facts are of course quite different. Ali Mirra exercised jurisdiction over close to 20,000 ha of choice agricultural land in the delta, of which less than one-third, perhaps only 25 percent, consisted of mechanized farms. Table 2.3 shows a breakdown of the distribution of holdings in Awssa in the early 1970s.

Table 2.3: Cultivated Land Controlled by Ali Mirra

Type of Holding	Area in Hectares	% of total
Land for Sultan's Private use	4085	21.2
Land used by Sultan's Tenants	10720	55.5
Land Operated by Sultan's Relatives, Agents, etc.	1150	6.0
Land Used by small Afar Farmers And ob- tained through Sultan	2550	13.2
Berga estate (mechanized, non Afar)	800	4.1
Total	19305	100.0

Source Hailu W. Emmanuel 1975

It may be worth noting that the majority of Ali Mirra's 'helots' were aggressive peasants from the neighboring high-land provinces (Wollo and Tigre), some of whom were running very profitable operations. As the table indicates, a large number of smallholders combined with independent mechanized plantations to make the area distinctly different from the others in the Valley.

A full and detailed analysis of the costs and benefits of capitalist agriculture and agro-industry in the Awash Valley is beyond the scope of this essay, nevertheless some indication of what the project was able to accomplish, and what its benefits to society were should be attempted. Appraising the performance of the AVA, the body charged with overseeing and

coordinating developmental activity in the Valley, a document prepared by international experts commended the Authority for its success in a number of areas of which the following were said to possess long-term benefits: a) rapid and continuous expansion of cotton and sugar production; b) improvements in production methods in the area through encouragement of improved technology and new farm techniques; c) successful introduction of haricot beans in the Middle Valley; and d) successful research programmes in a variety of crops, especially tobacco and sugar can (FAO/UNDP 1975). Harbeson has argued similarly that the development activities in the region have made a substantial contribution to agricultural production in the country. Table 2.4 is taken from his monograph, and the five crops shown took up at the time about 95 percent of the cultivated area in the Valley, including plantations and out growers.

Table 2.4: Production of Selected Crops in Awash Valley

Crops	Area in Hectares	Production in Tons	Gross value of Production Million E\$
Cotton Seed	30,900	67,750	66.4
Sugar Cane	10,500	136,500	85.2
Maize	7,485	29,940	3.1
Wheat	550	1,650	0.4
Fruit	870	30,111	7.7
Total	50,200	-	162.8

Source Harbeson

By the beginning of the 1970s, the annual gross value of production of all operating enterprises was estimated to be about E\$ 120 million, but by the end of 1973, it had reached nearly E\$ 163 million.

Another yardstick by which the economic benefits of the region may be measured is employment. There is some difficulty in determining the size of the labour force in the area,

since, except for the large concessions, most enterprises did not keep proper records of employees, wages, costs, and similar pertinent information. Nevertheless, from what is available, Harbeson has calculated that in the Valley as a whole 75,000 people benefited from seasonal work, and another 50,000 were employed as permanent labour. Using these two figures alone we arrive at a total work force at peak times of 125,000. In addition, there were a considerable number – perhaps as many as 20,000 according to one source – of "temporary" highland settlers who worked as out growers, contract farmers and tenants in the Middle and Lower Valleys¹². These outgrowers and contract farmers operated small holdings and did not use high technology but were able to win the confidence of the large agro-industries to which they were the main suppliers. Almost the entire work force, seasonal and permanent, in the Valley came from outside, and the main inhabitants of the region the Afar and the Kereyu, were totally uninvolved in the development activity going on around them. We shall return to this point later. Among the various community groups that benefited from employment opportunities here were the Kambatta, Wollaita, those from Wollo, and Tigrigna-speakers.

In addition to the employment provided, one must also include some important by-products or "spin-off effects" of development in the project area. This includes growth in urbanization, and expansion in consequence of commercial and small-scale industrial activity in the population centers along the Valley, beginning immediately south of Nazareth, and extending all the way to Dubti. The main urban centers in this arc – Wollechiti, Metahara, Awash Station, Gewane, and others – owe their existence, at least indirectly in some cases, to the development of the Awash basin. The total employment created in the urban-commercial sector in these "satellite" towns has been estimated by Harbeson to be about 25,000.

Harbeson also points out that there were 10 agro-industries that were directly dependent on, or associated with, the

¹² Harbeson. The source referred to is R. Hogg. For the work force in HVA-Wonji and Shoa, see Bahru.

Awash Valley development scheme, of which Indo-Ethiopian and Dire Dawa Textiles were the most important. We believe, however, that these two enterprises were not initially conceived as part of the Awash project, and it is therefore incorrect to include them as such. The enterprises that were spawned by the harnessing of the river were such small-scale manufacturing as oil pressing, soap-making, flour milling, and meat processing.

Let us now turn to the problem created by the development project, particularly those associated with the displacement of the pastoral people, the Afar and Kereyu in particular. From the point of view of the Afar in the Middle Valley, the most serious threat to their mode of life was the interference in the yearly and natural flooding of the river. Afar pastoralism depends on water and forage which was provided to a large extent by the periodic nature of flooding of the Awash. By constructing a dam at Qoqa, and two small water control schemes at Awash I and II further down, the authorities substituted controlled flooding for the natural one, and much of the water was diverted to and utilized by the plantations and other enterprises. According to Voelkner (1974), the Afar in the Middle Valley, who he says were originally semi-nomadic, have been forced to travel longer and longer distances in search of forage since the expansion of modern agriculture in the Valley. He further argues that they have now become not only more nomadic, but that their previous, prosperous existence has been ruined, and replaced by a life of poverty and insecurity (see also Flood 1975 for a defense of the Afar against mechanized farming).

The second major problem concerns the alienation by the government of land belonging by tradition to the pastoralists, and its transfer to private developers without the knowledge and consent of, and adequate compensation to, the communities concerned. The long and acrimonious conflict between these communities and the government, whose claims over the land rested on grounds of dubious legality, has been covered in almost all of the literature on the Awash Valley, and we shall refrain from reproducing it here. Suffice it to say that the issue grew to be a festering sore (sometimes leading to clashes and

violent outbreaks) which not only continued to embitter the pastoralists but also to add an element of uncertainty among investors, large and small in the area.

The third major problem had to do with the nature of the development activity within the Valley itself. Almost all sources on the subject point out that the economic activity in the area was taking place not only at the expense of the pastoralists, but also had succeeded in completely excluding them from participation in it. When looked at closely, however the problem becomes far more complicated than it has been made out to be. The rapid spread of mechanized development directly affected communities which were, even by Ethiopian standards, the most traditional, and the least economically adaptive. As Harbeson has aptly put it, these communities were exposed to, threatened and rudely shaken by, the most economically and technologically advanced agricultural development scheme to be imported into the country. The government had, of course, not done all it could to help the pastoralists adapt to the new conditions, but how much it could actually have done was limited by its lack of goodwill, and its ignorance of the people concerned.

The lack of participation of the pastoralists in the development process cannot however be blamed solely on government indifference, or capitalist avarice, but instead part of the blame must be assumed by the pastoralist themselves. "The state of development technology on the estates," writes Harbeson, was such that "most of the semi-nomadic peoples lack [ed] not only the motivation, but the skills and cultural orientation to participate directly in these enterprises" (:II-4).

Setit Humera. The more or less spontaneous development of this region on the borders of Gondar and Eritrea provinces and the Sudan by a host of independent and aggressive farmers and fortune seekers is the great success story of agricultural mechanization in the period under discussion. Almost all experts and advisors who were asked to examine the Humera project were unanimous in pronouncing it an outstanding success which held great prospects for the country in the area of export earn-

ings, and in the development of a vigorous local entrepreneurial class¹³.

The commercial exploitation of this area begins in the early 1960s, and it was spearheaded not by mechanized farmers, but by ox-cultivators and small holders from the highland areas of Gondar and Tigrai. By the latter half of that decade, there were about 1000 of these smallholders, although they were already being displaced in importance by mechanization. The area, comprising some 782,000 hectares of land had traditionally been utilized by a number of pastoralists, both local and transient, and, as in the case of the Awash Valley, the rights of these communities were ignored when development started.

Of the total area in the region, more than half, or 420,000 ha, was considered to be arable; of this land, some 72 percent, or slightly over 300,000 ha was under cultivation by the early 1970s. Not all of this land was exploited by mechanization since smallholder agriculture was still significant. About 58 percent of the cultivated area, i.e. 176,000 ha, was cultivated by tractor, and 42 percent or 128,000 ha by oxen. Of the total area under crops (both tractor and ox cultivated), 45 percent was given to the cultivation of the highly profitable export crop, sesame seed, and 12 percent to cotton; sorghum, some of which was consumed locally and some marketed, took up about 35 percent of the cultivated area (TAMS).

Following the classification scheme given in TAMS *Humera Report*, we shall divide the farmers in the area into three groups. The document reports that there were 4330 individuals with holdings in the area, of which some 214 or 5 percent, were tractor owners. There is no sure way of determining it but there is enough evidence to suggest that not all these owners were actual farmers themselves. The second group of farmers, known as tractor renters, numbered about 910 and formed 21 percent of the total framers. Most of these possessed animal power but rented capital equipment to enable them to culti-

13 The relevant sources are Burke and Thornley, Wetterhal, MLRA 1970, and TAMS (the most comprehensive study of Humera).

vate larger plots. The third group of farmers included those who owned and those who rented oxen for cultivation, and these numbered some 3206, or 74 percent of the farming population and constituted the largest stratum of cultivators in the area. There was a good deal of "mobility" between the third and second group because an individual with animal traction could become a tractor operator if he managed to rent one. The farmers in the third category were enterprising peasant farmers who made a living by employing traditional farming techniques. With the exception of one expatriate-run concession, all the enterprises in the area were managed and operated by Ethiopian entrepreneurs.

Setit Humera relied on a vast army of seasonal labour which flocked to it every peak labour season mostly from Gondar, Tigray and Eritrea provinces. The *Humera Report* estimates that at such times up to 65,000 labourers were deployed in the area. One story in *Addis Zemen* (15 Meskerem 1966 E.C.), which was based on interviews of labour recruiters from Humera, estimated that a work force of 100,000 was employed in 1972, but that a greater number was planned to be recruited for 1973 because of the excellent harvest that was expected. As in the case of the Awash Valley, the pastoralists in the neighbouring areas -the Wolqait and Tseggedo mainly (the Beni Amer were seasonal guests) - did not participate in any aspect of development activity taking place in the region.

Mainly as a result of the vigorous, though to some extent reckless, exploitation of the Humera region, Ethiopia's exports of sesame seed grew considerably in the period under discussion. At the end of the 1950s, Ethiopia was the fourth largest exporter of sesame in the world. With a total export of 10,000 metric tons, she stood behind Sudan - the league leader- Nigeria, and Tanzania. A decade later, she had overtaken all but Sudan, and lay second in the league table thanks mainly to Setit Humera. Ethiopia exported, in 1970, 40,000 metric tons, which enabled her to capture 20 percent of the world market in this crop; two years later, exports increased to 52,000 metric tons, and the country's share of the world market to 25 percent. Many planners and experts forecasted then that the country

would successfully corner one-third of the world market in sesame by the latter half of the 1970s, and the major force in this expansion was expected to be Setit Humera which already supplied 75 percent of the total export (Schmaedic 1973, TAMS, Aid Bank 1974).

A few general points before we bring this section to a close. The real impact of mechanized agriculture on economic growth and social change has yet to be seriously analyzed. The contributions of the sector to the developmental process must have been modest because planners and decision-makers, who had been overly enthusiastic about mechanization in the Third Five Year Plan, became distinctly disappointed by it even before the Plan had run its full course. The new strategy as conceived in the early stages of the Fourth Plan, was to give priority to smallholder agriculture, and to launch and expand integrated rural development along the lines of the package programmes with peasant production as the key element. How serious the government's disappointment was in the modern sector is revealed by the fact that there was not a single statement about large-scale agriculture in the draft outline of the Fourth Plan (Planning Commission 1973).

Be that as it may, modern agriculture was not a passive force in society, and its social consequences, both negative and positive, were beginning to make themselves felt when land reform prematurely laid incipient rural capitalism to rest. From our perspective, the most important and perhaps potentially the most "subversive" long-term effect of the process of agricultural modernization had to do with the movement of thousands of peasants across cultural, language and ecological barriers, induced by short-term or long-term employment opportunities.

It is our estimation that mechanized agriculture provided each year employment for something in the neighborhood of 350 thousand workers. In a good number of cases, however, the work force was of local origin, i.e. it was recruited from the areas where the agricultural enterprises were located. The major exceptions were Humera and the Awash Valley. In the former case, nearly 110,000 seasonal laborers, permanent staff

and farmers of all types; in the latter case, almost 150,000 laborers and resident highland farmers: all these originated from outside the respective regions. This movement of people and intermingling of diverse cultures carried within it the seeds of the gradual breakdown of ethnic narrow-mindedness and cultural prejudice. The coming together of individuals from different social backgrounds is the first and necessary step in the growth of cross-cultural awareness, and the development of class solidarity in a multiethnic society such as Ethiopia.

The Limitations of Mechanized Agriculture

We shall discuss the problem under three main headings: the fragmentation of mechanized agriculture, the cropping system and "production policy" of mechanized farms, and the nature of the commercial farmers themselves. The basic fact about mechanized agriculture was that it was still in infancy when it was subjected to rigorous scrutiny by its detractors, or held up as the new agent of rural development by its supporters.

The immaturity of agrarian capitalism revealed itself in what we wish to call the fragmentation of mechanized agriculture. In a majority of cases, the commercial farms scattered in several parts of the country were too small to be efficient for enterprises of their nature, and were often starved of the necessary capital. With the exception a few enterprises such as Tendaho, HVA, and the like, the concentration of production, and the consolidation of capital had not yet taken place. Our estimate, based on a reading of the available documentation, is that there were between 450 and 500 individual mechanized agricultural enterprises in the country on the eve of the land reform.

Table 2.5: Holdings of Chillalo Commercial Farmers

Size in hectares	No of Farmers	% of Farmers
Less than 200	107	85
201-400	12	10
401-600	3	2
601-800	3	2

Source CADU, 1973, p.52

The fragmentation of commercial farms has been better documented in Chillalo than elsewhere, although even here the data available is far from complete.

In this *awraja* there was only one farmer, out of a total of 126, who held land measuring over 1000 hectares.

The holding pattern for the rest of the farmers was as follows:

The overwhelming majority of farmers were small holders with less than 200 ha each. It is unfortunate that the document does not further breakdown this category of holdings, for there is reason to believe that the majority of farms was more modest in size, perhaps not very much more than 80 to 100 ha each. The data was collected from the files of the Assella office of the Ministry of Agriculture to which all commercial farmers in the area had to apply to qualify for the exemptions accorded them under the investment law of the country. The exemptions were however granted on an inversely graduated basis, that is, proportionate to the area operated by each farmer. It was common practice for farmers, not only in Chillalo but elsewhere, to inflate the size of land they reported in order to qualify for higher exemptions.

When we turn to the Rift Valley, we find ourselves in a quandary because the evidence is virtually silent about the subject under discussion. We know however that aerial photographs taken of the Meqi-Zwai region revealed that there was no farm which measured 1000 ha in the area. Indeed this was true of the entire Valley except for the well-known large plantations in Awassa, Billate and Lake Abbaya – Araba Minch¹⁴. One author writing about the Shashemene area, however, reports about a farm, the largest in the area, measuring about 1200 ha, although the median size of farms he says was 80 to 200 ha (Stahl 1974). In our estimation, the majority of farms were much smaller, perhaps in the 40 to 80 ha range, for the following reasons: a) because the cropping pattern employed in the region favored crops which could profitably be produced on

14 Land Resources Division 1976, P 140, 127-8; also, *ibid* 1975.

smaller plots, such as pulses, peppers, vegetables and fruit; and b) because the population density was high, and land scarce, meaning that farms here had to be small or of medium size.

Our assessment is born out by developments following the land reform. The Ministry of National Resources, which was at the beginning empowered to administer all state enterprises, both industrial and agricultural, took over about 131,000 ha of commercial farms and 966 tractors following the land nationalization proclamation (PMAC 1975). However, the majority of these enterprises were so fragmented and so uneconomical to operate that the state was forced to hand over nearly 60 percent of what it had confiscated to peasant associations and settlement programmes. Three years later what remained of the nationalized farms was only 54,000 ha. Most of the farms that were subsequently "de-nationalized" were located in the Rift Valley, and a small percentage in Arssi province (CPSC).

The Humera region presented a somewhat different picture. Fortuitous circumstances, in the form of vast, "unoccupied" land, encouraged many farmers to claim more land than they could efficiently operate. On the records, the average size of land held by tractor farmers ranged between 400 and 600 ha, while that registered under the name of ox-ploughing cultivators, between 50 and 350. What was registered under one's name and what was actually put to use were however two different things. The *Humera Report*, noted earlier, points out that the majority of tractor owners operated land between 350 to 400 ha in size, tractor renters around 50 ha, and those employing only animal traction much less than that. Thus, despite the fortuitous conditions, mechanized agriculture suffered here too, albeit not as acutely as in other places, from the fragmentation of production.

The second major limitation affecting mechanized agriculture revolved around the cropping system and production policy followed by the farmers themselves. It should be noted that despite the high utilization of capital equipment and modern inputs, the performance of mechanized agriculture did not always dramatically outshine that of the peasant sec-

tor. It would have been quite interesting if it was possible to measure accurately the comparative efficiency of the modern and traditional sectors, but unfortunately the evidence at hand is so patchy that it makes any attempt of the sort unrewarding. But let us look at what is available. Official estimates of yield of sorghum and maize in the peasant sector in the mid-70s put the figure between 12 to 16 quintals per hectare (q/ha) for the first crop, and 16 to 18 q/ha for the second; for sesame seed, the estimate came to about 2.6 q/ha. One writer has argued that under optimal conditions an enterprising peasant in the Ada area could obtain a yield of 12 q/ha. of teff which was as much as a commercial farmer would produce in the same area (Quenemoe 1968). In practice however, the average yield of teff in the peasant sector was about 7 q/ha, although in Chilalo, peasant yield had gone upto 9 q/ha in the early 1970s. In this same *awraja*, average yield for the local variety of wheat harvested on unfertilized peasant plots was 15 q/ha¹⁵ but if improved (or high yield) varieties and fertilization was employed, yield went up to 21 q/ha.

Let us now turn to the mechanized sector the figures for which come, like those for the peasant sector, from a number of disparate sources. According to Harbeson, yield in the Awash Valley for cotton seed, maize and wheat come to 22, 40 and 30 q/ha respectively in 1973. Boyd gives a comparable figure for cotton seed for the previous year: yield in the Upper Valley was 25, in the Middle 20, and in the Lower, 25 quintals per hectare. Estimates for Arssi and the Rift Valley are difficult to find, nevertheless it is suggested that a yield of 25 and 35 q/ha for wheat and maize is not an unreasonable estimate. Although the evidence is quite patchy and of poor quality, it does nevertheless indicate that the modern sector was only moderately superior to the traditional.

Judged by its own standards, commercial agriculture in the period under discussion suffered from poor performance and a slow rate of growth. Among some of the other con-

15 For official estimates of yield in peasant sector Ministry of Agriculture 1976, CADU 1972.

straints that need to be mentioned, the following are important. To begin with, mechanized agriculture was not really fully mechanized. Although the level of mechanization varied from one farm to another, almost all farms involved manual labour at some point in the production process. Generally speaking, land preparation and sowing was done by machines whereas weeding, and quite often harvesting and threshing, was done by manual labour. As a rule, the smaller farms were less mechanized than the larger ones, and fruit and vegetable growers employed hardly any machinery. Secondly, the cropping pattern, and the crop mix adopted by commercial farmers in each region was often identical to that employed by the surrounding peasantry. It was not uncommon to find large-scale farms broken up into smaller plots for the planting of different crops, a practice similar to peasant agriculture, and one which limited the maximization of the advantages of large scale production. In reality therefore, the superiority of modern agriculture over the traditional sector stemmed not so much from the application of better and more scientific agronomic methods as from the use of modern capital equipment.

On the other hand commercial farming practiced a form of agriculture which was environmentally damaging; soil management techniques were frequently poor and occasionally irresponsible. The urge to recoup one's investments and enjoy the profits quickly made farm operators show less concern for long-term environmental consequences. Indeed, even under the best conditions, peasant techniques of controlling soil erosion were frequently superior to those employed by commercial farmers (Ware-Austin 1970).

The third major limitation of mechanized agriculture had to do with the commercial farmers themselves. Who were these farmers and where did they come from? This question is an interesting one, although the evidence at our disposal is not sufficient to allow us to answer it in a definitive manner. Could this disparate group of fortune seekers involved in nascent capitalism be considered a class or a class-in-formation? We believe the answer should be given in the negative.

We shall distinguish three main social groups which

were actively engaged in the promotion of mechanized agriculture: a) individuals primarily engaged in the urban commercial sphere; b) civil servants, and men in the liberal professions; among the farmer we find both what the authors of the *Humera Report* characterized as "transient farmers". The system of transient cultivation was one in which the farmer was not by profession a farmer, did not reside in the vicinity of his farm, and was solely interested in extracting as much profit as possible and within the shortest time. Because of the hostile environment, the insecurity of tenure, and uncertain future prospects - and this was true of operations in the Awash Valley and the Humera region - the transient cultivator was not primarily concerned with the development of the land, with long-term investments, or amicable relations with the surrounding peasantry. He (there were very few women involved) was basically a "moon-lighter," out to make a quick buck while still clinging to his old business or profession. He appeared on his farm only occasionally, made the most minimal improvements on his holdings, and defaulted on his debt payments as often as he thought he could get away with it.

The structural limitations that we have discussed so far are essentially those of an incipient mode of production which has not yet overcome its own heterogeneity, and which has not yet been captured by an ascendant class.

Table 2.6: Class Background of Selected Commercial Farmers

Region	Percent of Farmers		
	Petty Bourg.	Landed Class	Other/Unknown
Arssi	73	17	10
Bale	69	25	6
Kaffa	66	23	11
S. Shoa	72	19	9

Source: Compiled from directory of Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce.

NOTE: 'Landed class' includes nobility and local gentry.

Table 2.6 above shows the class background of commercial farmers registered with the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and operating in selected parts of the country. In 1973, there were a total of 1500 commercial farm operations registered; this included not only mechanized farms but agro-industrial businesses and farm processing enterprises.

It is interesting that among the landed classes the local gentry were by far the largest group. On the other hand, "local" farm operators, i.e. farmers residing in the locality of their farms, meaning mostly small land owners and peasants-turned-farmers, were not insignificant. In Arssi, for example, local operators made up 25 percent of all commercial farmers; they were located in the Hitossa and Koffele areas. In Bale, the figure was 17 percent, in Harrar 37 percent. Local farmers in Kaffa, mostly coffee growers around the Sokorou area (some 80 kms east of Jimma) made up 20 percent of all farmers, and in Wollega the figure was 33 percent (Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce 1973).

Conclusion

The most serious criticism of rural capitalism was that it led to large-scale evictions of peasants. The evidence for this comes mainly from Chillalo in Arssi province, and the pioneer work on the subject has been that of Henock already referred to. A study prepared for CADU, later, reports that the number of farm holdings in the *awraja* had been reduced by 6500, or roughly by 21,000 ha due to evictions by mechanized agriculture (CADU 1973). Another official study has estimated that if the rate of evictions seen in Chillalo was repeated in other parts of the country, namely 3.5 percent per year, about 5 percent of the tenant population of the country, some 55,000 households (or half a million persons), would have been driven off the land by the early 1980s (MLRA 1972b: 19-20). Landlords were evicting peasants not only for mechanized cultivation but also for oxen cultivation of commercial crops using hired labour. Mechanization and the modernization process attempted through the package programmes was stimulating

the smaller landowners and some peasants to turn to commercial agriculture employing traditional farming techniques. On the other hand, direct eviction of peasants was not the only evil associated with large-scale farming. To this must be added what we may call "peasant displacement," which involved the deprivation of rural producers access to resources and rights which they had traditionally used or enjoyed, such as water, grazing land, transit points, forest products, and fishing rights. The area where peasant displacement was at its most acute was the Awash Valley.

We believe however that the criticism of mechanized agriculture on this score was at bottom a moral one, for under the existing conditions in rural Ethiopia the modernization and technological advancement of agriculture could not have taken place without evictions and peasant displacement. It should instead have been the government's indifference to rural unemployment, and its inability to provide alternative sources of income that should have been criticized. This is not an endorsement of the injustice done to the peasantry by the landed classless, but a recognition of reality however unsavory it may appear.

As we have tried to show elsewhere, the real criticism of mechanization lies in the fact that it emerged as an alien body, an implantation within the womb of peasant production. Large-scale agriculture was not the result of the evolution of the peasant mode of production, nor was the commercial farmer a product of the transition of segments of the peasantry. On the contrary, both mechanization and the mechanized farmer were transplanted from "outside" and stood as islands in a vast ocean of archaic production and social misery. From the very beginning, therefore, there could not develop mutual exchange or amicable relations between the two forms of production.

There are some who argue that commercial agriculture represented the "propulsive force" (to use a favorite phrase of the early planners), which was poised to transform the agricultural economy of the country. But a careful examination suggests that the route to capitalist development would have been more complex, and less dependent on the "transient" rural

capitalist. Already, in the last years of the Old Regime, commercial agriculture was showing signs of old age, having lost its earlier robustness due to, among other things, the oscillations of the world grain market, declining productivity, and higher prices of imported machinery and spare parts. It was indeed becoming clearer that improving peasant farm practices would bring more benefits, at least in so far as food crops were concerned, than bringing new land under mechanized cultivation, mainly because the land available for such purposes would have required heavy investment. Moreover, the route to capitalist development via commercial agriculture would have involved massive evictions of peasants from the land, the consequences of which would have been profound rural discontent and may-be even violent disorder. In contrast, transformation through the agency of the smallholder-turned-capitalist "kulak" would have involved less social pain, and would have been more sustainable in the long run. But all this is speculation, and no one will really know what the nature of the changes would have been if the Old Regime had not been so rudely dismantled, and if the political process had allowed a peaceful transition.

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(Note: Unless otherwise noted, the place of publication of all works is Addis Ababa)

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LAND AND AGRARIAN UNREST IN WOLLO

From the Imperial Regime to the Derg

This study grew out of my research into environmental policy in Wollo, which I began in 1994 and which was part of a larger research project entitled "Environment and Social Change in Wollo". It is based on archival material from the Ministry of Interior (MoI) collected as part of this project.

The Wollo Province files of the MoI consist of three main parts: a) reports, letters and documents of the Wollo administration transmitted to the Ministry in Addis Ababa; b) confidential reports, letters and documents of the Wollo security office submitted to the Public Security Department of the MoI; and c) reports, letters and documents of the Wollo police sent to police headquarters in Addis Ababa. Unfortunately, the archives were not complete; important records were missing, whole files were unaccounted for. When the Commission of Inquiry on the Wollo Famine, set up in 1974, held its hearings, witnesses requested and were provided with files from the MoI, but some of these files were later not returned or were misplaced. Many files are not kept in their proper file folders, neither do they have file numbers or other forms of identification. Those that do have proper identification, the numbers on them are a combination of Amharic alphabets and numbers, which made it difficult to cite. I have referred to all files simply by the Ethiopian year of their origin. I have not copiously cited the archival sources in the footnotes partly for these reasons¹⁶

16 The archival materials and other documents collected in the course of the project, were deposited with the Institute of Ethiopian Studies when the Project was completed. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Asnake Ali, the program officer of the project

The Study

This study covers two important historical periods, namely the last half decade of the imperial regime and the first three years of the Revolution. The unrest in question refers to: a) scattered but widespread resistance to new forms of taxation which broke out in rural Wollo in 1968 and continued for several years, and, b) violent opposition to the land reform initiated by the Derg, the high point of which were the years 1975 to 1977. The uprisings occurred under two radically different agrarian regimes, however, as we shall see later, on both occasions the active elements were what I have termed the local gentry, and the centres of unrest were the rugged and inaccessible *awrajas* of western and northern Wollo. The objective of the study is not to present yet another narrative of rural rebellion (see Gebbru 1991 for that), but rather to place the events in their local context and to examine the structure of class relations in rural Wollo. The issue of land was central to the resistance on both occasions, and the events may be described as an attempt on the part of the dissidents to deny the state the power to redefine rights of property and taxation.

My focus will be on what I call "traditional forms" of agrarian protest. I shall not discuss the activities of organized opposition movements such as the EPLF, TPLF, EPRP, and EDU, which emerged in the early years of the Revolution and which operated in the northern provinces of the country, including Wollo. Traditional forms of protest provide a better measure of the extent of local-based opposition to new policies and reforms, whereas modern opposition movements, which

(now deceased), for his effort in collecting the materials. The two Annexes at the end of the study list the names of important personages in the local government in Wollo, and in the protest movement in the years under discussion. A list of acronyms is also given at the end. I use the term "Revolution" to mean not just the overthrow of the imperial regime but also the period of the Derg. This is a revised version of a paper which originally appeared as IDR Research Report No. 46, 1996, Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa University.

are invariably initiated by urban-based elements, are more often political and military vehicles of struggles for power. Here, it is not the specific policies and reforms that are contested, as is the case with traditional uprisings, but rather state power itself. My subject is thus concerned with rural protest in the narrower sense of the term, i.e., struggles over land involving men and women who, in one way or another, claimed rights of ownership, possession or use.

Traditional rural protest may be seen as the articulation, by peaceful or violent means, of local grievances and discontent. It aims to right what are perceived to be specific wrongs, and to defend existing privileges and property rights, and not to bring about a new social or political order. Among the peasantry, protest is frequently directed against taxes, rent, corvee labour, and the expropriation of ancestral lands; among the propertied classes, it is aimed against reforms that impinge upon the economic and political privileges of these classes. Such protests are, to use Hobsbawm's phrase, archaic forms of social agitation, but unlike his models, the agitations we are dealing with here were neither reformist nor revolutionary (Hobsbawm 1971). Indeed, they were for the most part backward looking, even reactionary, their aim being to hold back social change and agrarian reform. What is also distinctive about our case is that it was not the subaltern classes that were the chief authors of the conflicts. Perhaps, a comparison with political protest in pre-modern Europe, with its mixture of noble and peasant uprisings may be more meaningful here (see Berce 1987).

There is a tendency in the local debate to lump all conflicts that occur in the countryside under the general heading of "peasant rebellions", but a closer, more class-based examination of each episode would reveal a more complex picture. Admittedly, the literature concerned is very limited, and consists of Gebru's pioneering study and a few unpublished monographs, nevertheless, the dominant discourse is in terms of "peasant resistance" to state power or landlord impositions. Similarly, the general literature on agrarian unrest (which we shall not discuss here), while pointing to inter-class as well as intra-class conflicts, places heavy emphasis on protest activities inspired

or organized by peasants (see Isaacman 1990) This study is different in that the key actors in the agitations under study were not peasants but the rural power elite, in particular, landlords, state officials, magistrates, and paramilitary officers, which, collectively, I shall call the local gentry. What was common to these persons was that they were all men of property, and had a strong role in local government.

I shall also examine the varying roles the peasantry played in these agitations, making in each particular case, a strategic entry into the protest movement to advance its interests when the opportunities allowed. While rural uprisings initiated and directed by peasants have been quite rare, and the gentry in contrast have frequently been in the forefront of such movements, peasants have often played a not insignificant role in the course of on-going agitations. On the other hand, though the evidence is scanty, peasants must certainly have frequently engaged, on their own, in what may be called hidden or everyday forms of resistance, but, for obvious reasons, most of these do not appear in the records and hence are difficult to examine (*vid.* Scott 1985).

The Gentry and Local Power Structure in Wollo

Very little work has been done on rural class formation and the structure of power at the local level, either in the imperial or post-Revolution period. The few studies on "social stratification" that appeared at the end of the 1960s (see Cohen 1973), are inadequate for our purposes as they do not discuss in depth the structure of power at the level of rural communities. Cohen's short article on "provincial elites" is about "rural and town community leaders", and the "elites" he discusses are made up of a wide variety of social groups, including not only the propertied elements and local officialdom, but also grain merchants, school teachers, priests, sheikhs, leaders of voluntary associations, and elders. The work is thus too amorphous and unsatisfactory. The exception here is Hoben (1973) who discusses the role of the landed gentry in his work on land tenure in Gojjam. To get a sense of the web of power at the local

level, and to see the place of the peasant in it, we need to examine briefly the structure of local administration in the period immediately before the Revolution.

The Ministry of Interior, which was perhaps the most powerful Ministry in the imperial government (but which was abolished when the present government came to power), was responsible for overseeing provincial and local administration, and for the police and public security. Decree No. 1 of 1942 (as amended) defined the administrative system, and the powers and duties of all appointed officials¹⁷. It vested all powers of appointment in the hands of the emperor. The country's administrative division consisted of the *teklai ghizat* (the province), the *awraja* (sub-province), *woreda* (district), and *mikitl woreda* (sub-district). Except for the last named, which was abolished in 1973, this structure remained unchanged until the mid-1980s (see Cohen and Koehn 1980; Markakis 1974). Wollo province was then divided into 12 *awrajas*, 37 *woredas*, and 178 *mikitl woredas*.

All provinces, except Wollo and Harrarghe, whose governorships were vested in members of the royal family, were administered (or ruled, in the language of the time) by governors-general. In Wollo, the Crown Prince was the Chief Governor, but the actual administration of the province was entrusted to an imperial appointee called the *Enderassie* (literally meaning "on my behalf"), who was assisted by a Deputy Chief *Enderassie*, similarly appointed. Except in Wollo and Harrarghe, the emperor appointed all governors down to the *woreda* level.

17 For Decree No. 1, see *Consolidated Laws*, Vol. I. I shall leave out other legislation on local government, such as the *awraja* self-administration Order of 1966. Order No. 86 of September 1973, which actually repealed Decree No. 1, came too late to be implemented. According to this Order, the administrative division of the country remained unchanged except that the *mikitl woreda* was abolished. The Emperor appointed *Enderassies* to all provinces, and administrators to all *awrajas*; these were the only posts filled by imperial appointment. The *woreda* administrator was appointed by the Minister of Interior. The term "governor" was replaced by "administrator".

Governors were supported by what were called principal secretaries and directors, of which those of the provincial and *awraja* posts were also appointed by the emperor. Finally, all judges down to the *woreda* level were imperial appointees. In Wollo, on the other hand, all *awraja* and *woreda* governors, judges and senior officials were appointed by the Crown Prince. While, in principle, all officials were recommended for appointment by their respective Ministries, most appointees at lower levels of administration were local men with extensive local interests. A strong patronage system was in evidence: each official at the higher rung used his influence to promote his men at the lower rung. The *mikitl woreda* governor, for instance, the humblest such post in this hierarchical system, who was a local appointee, owed his position thanks to a patron higher up at the *woreda* or *awraja* administration. Governors at the *awraja* level and below exercised immense power, and the posts were also very lucrative.

From the latter part of the 1950s, a great many of the governors in Wollo were persons with feudal titles. Frequently, the rank of the office holder corresponded to the hierarchy of the post. A *balambaras*, the lowest rank in the feudal hierarchy, was a *mikitl woreda* governor, while most *woreda* governors were *grazmach* and *kegnazmach*. On the eve of the Revolution, at the end of 1973, nine of the twelve *awraja* governors in the province were *fitawraris*; the exceptions were Aussa, Wag and Ambassel *awrajas* (see Annex 1). Aussa was governed by a military officer, and this had been a tradition all through the imperial period. Wag's administration was customarily vested in its ancient hereditary ruling house, known as the *wag shum*. Only Ambassel was administered at the time by a non-titled person, although many previous governors of the *awraja* were *fitawrari* or *kegnazmach*. Ambassel was in fact one of the two *awrajas* in Wollo (the other being Aussa) where the *awraja* self-administration system was being tried out in 1973/74, and the governor at the time was appointed for that purpose by the emperor. There were of course exceptions to this. *Kegnazmach* Assefa Tareqegn, whose rebel force came close to attacking Dessie at the end of 1975, was governor of Wadla Delanta *awraja*.

Until 1973, the *Enderassie*, the highest appointed post in the province, was *Fitawrari* Mammo Seyoum, though the two *Enderassies* that succeeded him were both *dejazmach*. Governors were frequently shifted from one *awraja* to another within the province, however, most of the governors who were appointed in the 1950s retained their governorship right up to the outbreak of the Revolution. *Fitawrari* Belay Zelelew, for example, who was one of the leaders of the opposition against the Derg, was governor of Wore Illu and Wadla Delanta *awrajas* in the late 1950s and early '60s, then became governor of Raya Qobo in the latter part of the decade, and finally governor of Yejju at the time the Derg assumed power.

All titled persons had extensive property holdings, and their lands were worked by tenant farmers. This was in large part true also of judges, principal secretaries, directors and other senior state officials. Such property may have been acquired in part through inheritance, but the initial patrimony would certainly have been augmented through state grants of land, and by using one's influential position in the government. Indeed, one of the benefits of a government post was that it enabled the office holder to accumulate wealth, especially in the form of urban and rural property. Moreover, rights and privileges claimed by the gentry gave them not only access to land, but the labour services of peasant households, and control over important natural resources. Frequently, forestland or pasture that by long tradition was common property, was claimed by governors as one of the rewards of office.

The responsibility for law and order was vested in the police, but the force was thinly spread out in the rural areas and, in fact, did not extend beyond the *woreda*. To make up for this deficiency and to assist the police when necessary, the government made use of a paramilitary force known as the *nech lebash*¹⁸. Originally set up in 1944, the force was made up

18 A good source on this is Fekadu Begna 1990a; see also Cohen and Koehn, and Markakis. State documents refer to the force as "special constables"; Cohen and Koehn, and Markakis call it a "civil or auxiliary police force", while Fekadu speaks of it as a "peasant army". The force combined the functions of a rural police force and rural

of volunteers who were issued rifles and who served without a regular salary, though they were paid an allowance when on duty. Some of the tasks of the *nech lebash* were serving as prison guards, pursuing and apprehending criminals, especially bandits, putting down rural disturbances and revolts, and guarding government offices, in particular local state treasuries. The *nech lebash* were particularly active in areas where communication was difficult, and where there was a long tradition of outlawry. Wollo in fact was *nech lebash* country *par excellence* since most of it was inaccessible by modern transport, and since banditry was endemic, particularly in the north and west of the province. When, after the Revolution, the Derg offered amnesty to all outlaws, a large number of them in western Wollo took advantage of the offer and returned to normal life.

Nech lebash received grants of land for their continued services, and such land, known as *galla meret*, came with certain tax privileges. *Galla meret* was heritable so long as the holder provided military service. In 1966, holders of *galla meret* were allowed, by a special dispensation of the emperor, to convert part of their holdings (between 1 to 5 *galla meret*, according to the rank of the holder) to freehold. When the Territorial Army was set up in 1958, the Wollo *nech lebash* were absorbed into it. According to Fekadu, no new recruitment took place in the province, as the heirs of the *nech lebash* of the 1940s continued to staff the Territorial Army. He notes that the Territorials in Wollo numbered a little over 8,000 in the early 1960s, and a decade later the figure had risen to 10,400. The Territorials had their own corps of commanding officers, and these too were beneficiaries of land grants as payment for their services. According to Fekadu, the provincial commander received 93 *galla meret*, his assistant 20; an *awraja* commanding officer got 15 *galla meret*, while a major, 5 (Fekadu 1990a: 53)¹⁹. These "rural

militia. The term *nech lebash* continued to be in use in Wollo official documents through the 1970s even though the force was replaced by the Territorial Army in 1958. Following my source material, I shall also be using the earlier term instead of the latter.

19 The special imperial order for Wollo allowing the transfer of *galla meret* to freehold appeared in *Addis Zemen*, 14 Nehassie

soldiers" as well as their officer corps were a privileged group in rural Wollo; certainly, the upper echelon were part of the local gentry, but even the humblest among them was better endowed than the average peasant. Moreover, the government treated the soldiery as a whole much better than the general populace. The *nech lebash* were, however, unpopular with the peasantry. As landowners, they were reputed to be hard on their tenants, who were subject to eviction at short notice. As soldiers, they were given to looting and extortion. Indeed, peasants in the western *awrajas* of Wollo often faced a double jeopardy: they were liable to be looted by bandits, who were common here, as well as by the *nech lebash* who came in pursuit of them.

The power structure at the local level reflected the fusion of economic and political power. Every peasant, be he/she a tenant or owner cultivator, lived under the influence of the landlord-cum-state official: the governor, the senior functionary, the judge, the *nech lebash*, in a word, the gentry. All such persons from the *awraja* down to the *mikiṭl woreda* are included in my definition of gentry. For the gentry, state office, however lowly it was, reinforced their economic dominance, giving them a greater measure of control over the peasantry. There were of course gradations within the gentry, and one may distinguish between the upper and lower gentry, but such distinctions will not concern us here. As a class, the gentry were located between the peasantry and other subordinate rural groups on the one hand, and the landed nobility on the other. This "intermediate" position was their strength as well as their weakness: As a force with an immediate and strong presence in the rural world, they had considerable autonomy; but separated as they were from the major centres of power, they had no say in policy formulation, and served, by and large, as conduits for government decisions.

The relation between the gentry and the state was a com-

1958 EC (1966 GC). *Galla meret* was a tenure form as well as a unit of measurement. Nobody seems to know for sure what this was in hectares or *timad*. One informant estimated that one *galla* was equivalent to one-sixth of a *gasha* (about 7 ha.), while another thought it measured 4 ha.

plicated one, but each needed the other for its own purposes. The state depended on the gentry for the extension of its own authority, especially in the outlying districts where its presence was not firmly established. The need to reach every locality and to secure all sources of revenue could only be achieved in partnership with local power groups. Historically, the local gentry guarded their local prerogatives jealously, and the competition between them and the central state was long and often bloody. Writing about northern Wollo, McCann makes the observation that when the imperial state was weak the local elite was an independent force, often successfully competing with the former for privileges and power. However, in the twentieth century, he points out, the "state grew in power dramatically vis-a-vis the local elite, absorbing its local prerogatives and co-opting its local agents" (1987: 43). In most cases, the state's aim was co-optation and co-operation. In the end, members of the gentry benefited by their association with the state: as noted above, a government position enhanced their standing in the locality.

However, in the face of the growing centralisation and modernisation of the machinery of government, which occurred all through the 1950s and '60s, this mutually supportive relationship could not be maintained. Modernisation enabled the state to project its authority more forcefully, and to embark on development activities, which involved the provision of hitherto unknown services such as health, education, extension, transport, communication, etc.. At the same time, state modernisation was accompanied by the abolition of regional particularism and privilege, and the gradual erosion of the power of the gentry. The expansion of the modern state came at the expense of local powers, and it was resented and resisted. Under normal circumstances, the gentry were content to serve the state; when their interests were threatened, as they were by state centralisation and modernisation, it was the first to protest and rebel. This explains in part the string of rural uprisings, which for the most part were gentry instigated, which plagued the imperial regime in the decades of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. While the ultimate objective of these insurrections was

the defence of gentry interests, popular grievances, and resentments against mal-administration and injustice, in a word, complaints close to the heart of the peasantry, were occasionally aired in the course of the agitations.

The relation between the gentry and the nobility was equally involved. For the purposes of this study I shall define the nobility as large, absentee landowners who staffed the higher levels of the national government, and who were placed close to the centres of power. The patron-client relationship which linked the gentry to the nobility was, as it were, a working relationship, as well as an "ideological" one. While many gentry, particularly the upwardly mobile, benefited from the support of the nobility, in the last instance, the gentry were not as dependent on the latter as the patronage system might indicate. This partial independence, and their domination of the local power structure gave the gentry a greater measure of initiative and autonomy vis-a-vis the state, something the nobility could not replicate due to its location in the hierarchy of power.

The relationship between the gentry and the peasant had a good deal of the personal element in it. The gentry were locally based, and their relation with the peasant was immediate, and frequently involved face-to-face and individual contact. All gentry had their land worked by tenants whom they knew in good measure; further, their work in government brought them in close contact with the local peasantry. Many in fact frequently travelled through the rural areas as part of their duties, acquiring in the process a fairly good knowledge of the population, the land and the natural environment. However, I would argue (though the evidence is scanty) that their greater familiarity with local conditions did not necessarily make them more lenient or accommodating landlords. In fact, their proximity to the production process gave them a better bargaining power over their tenants, enabling them to squeeze more surpluses out of their subordinates.

The question may be asked: since this study is based mainly on archival sources, how does one identify the gentry from the records? The answer is as follows. In each period under discussion, the archives provide lists of persons said to be

rebels and rebel leaders. Quite frequently, though not in every case, the lists, which are often taken from the files of the security services, identify persons either by the honorific "Ato" or by title or military rank, whichever is appropriate. I consider all titled persons from the lists, including men with military rank (and titled clergy) as belonging to the gentry. Some of the untitled persons are identified as judges, principal secretaries or senior government officials; these are also part of the gentry. I also include most of the other untitled persons in the same class on the grounds that their names would not have appeared in the records if they were humble folk.

Land Taxation and Agrarian Unrest

The rural unrest which broke out in Wollo in the late 1960s should be seen against a background of increasing discontent among the rural population about the inadequacies of land tenure and land taxation in the province. Complaints on both issues were frequent, and the MoI archives contain a number of reports recording appeals by local residents for changes in existing tenure arrangements and for proper tax assessments. Until its abolition by the land reform of 1975, the land system in Wollo was complex, and to my knowledge no thorough study has been done on it to date. The few works that are available give only a partial picture (CSO 1967, Fekadu 1990b, MLRA 1968). Due to space limitations, an extended analysis is out of the question here, and we will have to be content with a brief discussion of the subject.

The variety of tenure arrangements, and of the obligations on holdings and landuse in Wollo are too numerous to record here. What makes the subject more confusing was also that some forms of tenure had different names in different parts of the province. Thus *galla meret*, for instance, the term used in central and western Wollo, was known as *alenga meret* in Yejjju *awraja*. According to MLRA's report, the main forms of tenure may be grouped into two broad categories: those where the primary right of access resided in the official holder, and those which were encumbered with a variety of obligations of which

the main ones were state and military services. In the first category were *gebbar meret*, which the report likens to freehold and in which the owner paid all legally prescribed taxes to the government. *Semon meret* was land held in the name of the Church and on which the Church collected all taxes; *woqf meret* was held for the upkeep of mosques. Under the second category was *maderia meret*; this was land held by the state but given to individuals for services rendered. Some *maderia* was granted to *nech lebash*, though, as noted above, it was *galla meret*, the other tenure form in this category, which was the main source of land grants to the force; the latter tenure actually is *maderia* encumbered with military obligations. *Mengist meret* was also government property, but such land was often leased out to communities or groups of people for farming or grazing purposes. Two antiquated tenure forms, *gult* and *rist-gult*, were abolished by proclamation in the mid-1960s. I must note that MLRA's report gives only a partial picture, and a number of tenure arrangements, some specific to specific localities, have been left out. For example, the *rist* system (or communal ownership as MLRA likes to describe it) which was common in parts of Lasta, Wag, and the western *awrajas*, has virtually been ignored. However, since the report's findings were based on *awraja* records, the tenure forms described were those recognized by the government and registered in the *awraja* for tax purposes. Thus, while the picture provided might be incomplete, it is not altogether inaccurate.

Of the tenure forms given in the report, the most widespread were *gebbar*, *semon* and *galla meret*. Table 3.1 shows the distribution of unmeasured land by tenure in the eight *awrajas* of Wollo. Over 90 percent of the land under cultivation in Wollo was unmeasured. Wag and Lasta are left out presumably because the land system here was predominantly *rist*; however the *rist* system was also found in the western *awrajas*, the last three in the Table. Aussa consisted mostly of range-land held under customary tenure.

Table 3.1: Unmeasured Land in Wollo by Tenure
(%)

<i>Awraja</i>	<i>Geb'r</i>	<i>Semon</i>	<i>Gall</i>	<i>Other</i>
Ambas	72.2	09.1	18.7	-
D.Zur	55.3	18.2	16.6	09.7
Qallu	70.3	07.7	17.7	04.3
Yejuu	64.7	14.1	21.3	-
Worel	75.5	11.8	09.0	00.7
Boren	77.4	09.8	04.4	16.8
WoreH	77.3	15.8	06.2	00.7
Wadla	59.1	09.4	28.3	03.2
Wollo	68.5	11.5	15.0	05.0

Source: MLRA, p. 17.

In his rural history of northern Wollo, McCann argues that there was a steady population growth in the area (and presumably in the rest of the province) since the latter part of the nineteenth century. This demographic pressure was accompanied by increasing fragmentation of family plots in the early twentieth century. The consequent shortage of farm land and intensification of land-use drove cultivation down into the lowlands and up onto steeper slopes, which in turn led to the clearance of forests and bush-land and to large-scale environmental degradation (:33-34). The evidence for this thesis is not arguable, nevertheless McCann suggests that the longer view is essential for an understanding of the processes that shaped the rural economy of Wollo. The historical record for agrarian change in the decades before the 1960s is quite scanty, however, that land was becoming a scarce commodity in the 1950s and much earlier is evidenced by considerable migrations of Wollo peasants in this period to the eastern and south-western parts of the country.

While I have some doubts about the accuracy of the findings, CSO's base-line survey of rural Wollo, carried out in the mid-1960s, confirms that land scarcity was a growing problem and that operated holdings were small. Over 80 percent of holdings in the province measured less than one hectare and only six percent over two hectares. Average holdings

were relatively bigger in the western *awrajas* (a little over one hectare) than in the province as a whole (0.97 hectare). The survey shows that 14 percent of Wollo households were landless, though this may be a bit on the high side. Of the operated holdings, 60 percent were owned, 17 percent rented, and 23 percent partly owned and partly rented. If these figures are accurate, it means *de facto* tenancy (i.e. pure tenancy and mixed tenure, which adds up to 40 percent) was quite considerable. It is noteworthy that the figures for such tenancy are higher in the western and northern *awrajas*, which were partly *rist* areas, than in central Wollo. Though accurate figures are not available, we may safely assume that most *maderia*, *galla*, *semon*, and a good portion of *gebbar meret* were operated under share tenancy.

Changes in tenure forms, and the reclassification of land on grounds of tax defaults were not infrequent. In 1956 and again in 1966, holders of *maderia* and *galla meret* (mostly *nech lebash*) were allowed, by special legislation, to convert part of their holdings to freehold. This meant that tenants operating such lands were faced with the threat of eviction or higher rental obligations. According to MoI archives, in the *awrajas* of Ambassel, Yejjju, and Raya Qobo, there were serious complaints by community leaders in the early 1960s that land which previously had been *gebbar* was converted to *galla* (evidently to benefit *nech lebash*); the communities demanded that such land be restored to its original status. In these same decades, lands on which holders were found or alleged to have failed to pay regular taxes and to meet their obligations were declared *gibr ferash* (meaning "tax defaults"); such lands were reclassified and granted to others under new terms. This was a source of resentment among many rural communities, especially in Wore Illu and Yejjju. When *rist-gult* was abolished by law in the mid-1960s, the land was converted to *gebbar*. In brief, such numerous tenure changes, which frequently involved higher tax obligations and/or more burdensome terms of tenancy, were a serious cause of insecurity among landholders and land users. It is noteworthy that the tenurial changes occurring at the time were in the direction of greater individualization of

ownership.

From the 1950s on, and as a result of the expansion of social services, there was a growing demand on the part of Government for more revenue. While agriculture's contribution to state revenue was modest, there were attempts by policy planners to have the rural sector contribute more to the national treasury. The 1967 agricultural income tax must be seen in this light. Prior to this legislation, the tax burden²⁰ consisted of the land tax, tax in lieu of tithe, cattle tax, and education and health tax. While, by law, it was the landowner who was responsible for most of these taxes, many of them were passed on to the tenant. In Wollo, the fiscal burden on the tenant and the small owner-cultivator was heavier than that on the landowner. In principle, the tenant's obligation was to pay cattle tax to the state, *asrat* (one-tenth of the harvest) to the landowner, and, if he was a Church tenant, land tax and tithe to the Church. In general, tax rates were higher on measured than on unmeasured land.

Taxes have always been unpopular among the peasantry in Ethiopia, particularly so in Wollo. Not only had tax rates and methods of assessment and collection here changed frequently with changes in local tenure, but also there were numerous aggravating circumstances which depressed agricultural production and enfeebled peasant households. On a number of occasions, rural communities in several parts of the province had asked the government to relieve them of the tax burden on grounds of unfavourable environmental conditions, poor harvests or famine. In the period before the Revolution, there were two major famines in Wollo, in 1964-67, and again in 1972-74. At the same time, all through the second half of the 1950s and the whole of the 1960s, rural Wollo was suffering from widespread pandemics and cattle disease, and localized food shortages. The Mol records for the year 1950 EC (1957-58 GC), for example, show that an outbreak of smallpox, typhus, and ma-

20 For the various tax legislations see *Consolidated Laws*, Vol. I and II. The 1967 tax legislation is titled "Proclamation 255, Income Tax Amendment Proclamation of 1967". For a discussion of taxation and revenue collection, see Cohen and Koehn, and Taye Gulilat 1968.

laria, swept through almost all the *aurajas* of Wollo bringing death and privation to thousands of households. In the same year, widespread cattle disease depleted households' livestock assets. Disasters of this kind continued through the 1960s though with varying degrees of severity. In such circumstances, peasants were unable to meet their fiscal burdens, and in some instances communities simply refused to pay their taxes. The records show that in the decade of the 1960s, there were few years when land and other taxes were collected in full in Wollo. Communities defaulted on their payments due to natural disaster, poor harvests and as a mark of protest against unpopular tenure policy. Landowners in most parts of Raya Qobo *auraja*, for example, had stopped paying their taxes as far back as 1962; they had resolved not to pay until their lands were measured and properly assessed.

Nobody anticipated that the 1967 tax legislation, which triggered the Gojjam uprising as well as that of Wollo, would cause so much bitterness and agitation when it was first promulgated²¹. The Ministry of Finance, which was the initiator of the legislation, and which was keen to have it quickly enforced, believed that the new law would be part of a new process of rationalization of rural taxation and revenue collection. Cohen and Koehn argue that the legislation was an attempt to shift the tax burden from the tenant to the landowner, while Taye Gulilat is of the opinion that if the legislation had been implemented fairly and properly, tenant cultivators would have carried a lighter tax burden.

The legislation abolished the tax in lieu of tithe and replaced it with a tax on income from agricultural activities and land rent. It was not only the tenant who paid the tax, based on his annual production but the landowner who received rent. The tax was moderately progressive; the tax schedule starts at 0.5 percent for those with taxable income of up-to Eth.\$300

21 The tax legislation triggered the Gojjam revolt which has been the subject of several studies, among them: Schwab 1972; Hoben 1973; Markakis; and Gebru. The Wollo uprising sparked by the same legislation has been totally ignored. The discussion in the next few pages is based on MoI files for the year 1960 EC (1967/68 GC).

per year, rises to 5.4 percent for those with income of upto Eth.\$3000, and reaches 20 percent for those with Eth.\$27,000 and over. The tax in lieu of tithe was, in principle, paid by the landowner however the tenant paid *asrat* to his landlord to offset the tithe the latter paid to the government. Landlords actually benefited because *asrat*, which was frequently paid in kind, was often higher in value than the tithe (Taye Gulilat 1968). Since the legislation abolished tithe payment, the tenant in principle had no obligation to pay *asrat*. To assess income levels, the new law empowered local communities to establish assessment committees made up of community leaders and officials of the local government. The committees' job was to determine the tax payable on agricultural activities, and this involved visiting each farm and agricultural operation. Tax assessors were not required to measure farm plots, but in most parts of rural Wollo assessment was understood to involve land measurement, which, as we shall see below, turned out to be very unpopular. The Ministry of Finance moved swiftly to implement the legislation, but no attempt was made to explain the provisions of the law to the rural population, nor even to the government agents who were involved in its implementation. Indeed, many senior officials at the province and *awraja* level did not fully understand the legislation. The proclamation was issued in December 1967, and implementation started in Wollo about a month and half later. This was a difficult task that involved the selection of assessment committees and their deployment in each locality.

The haste with which implementation was undertaken aroused the fears of the rural population. The first outbreak of protest occurred in Wadla Delanta *awraja* in early March 1968. This was soon followed by widespread agitations in Lasta, Wag and Raya Qobo *awrajas*. Events moved at a very fast pace, and the discontent spread to Qallu *awraja* where communities refused to allow their land to be measured or their crops to be assessed. Towards the end of the year, a violent revolt broke out in Borena *awraja*. By early 1969, much of rural Wollo was in ferment, and, of the eleven *awrajas* (excluding Aussa), only Dessie Zuria, Ambassel and Yejjju were quiet.

The revolt in Wollo started in 1968 and continued through 1969. There were some scattered incidents of protest in 1970, and if it had not been for the onset of the drought and food crisis in the early 1970s, which turned everyone's attention to more pressing issues, such incidents would have gone on for several more years. The disputes that sparked the uprising rankled in many minds for a while. What provoked the revolt, and what were the issues that aroused such widespread opposition?

First and foremost, the issue that aroused bitter hostility was land measurement. It was believed in most parts of Wollo that land measurement was an integral part of tax assessment, and almost all communities were strongly opposed to it on the grounds that land measurement would inevitably lead to higher taxes. Secondly, landowners in the western *awrajas* insisted that theirs were *rist* areas and that they should not be subject to new taxes. Many in fact demanded that existing tax rates should not be changed. The demands of protestors from the northern *awrajas* were somewhat different. They argued that due to repeated droughts, famines and similar disasters, communities here were unable to pay the new taxes. They protested that tax assessment committees were selected without the participation of the communities concerned, and these committees had committed serious improprieties in discharging their duties. They alleged that tax assessment was undertaken unfairly, and that communities were denied the right of appeal.

Behind these issues lay deep-seated apprehensions and grievances. Even before it was implemented, everybody suspected that the new legislation would lead to increased taxation, and the protest could thus be considered as protest against higher taxes. Public opinion was vindicated by later events: in those areas where the legislation was implemented and taxes were paid according to the new rates, the tax collected was much higher than in previous years. However, land measurement was resisted not only for its tax implications but because landowners did not wish to have the full extent of their holdings revealed; some of these holdings were most probably not registered for tax purposes, a practice which was not uncom-

mon among the gentry and nobility.

The protest was also a measure of the lack of trust on the part of gentry and peasant alike on government policy. As noted above, the frequent changes of tenure in the province in the past had caused apprehension among many sectors of rural society, and this new legislation was considered to be yet another surreptitious effort to introduce changes again. Further, the legislation imposed a new tax -tax on rental income- on landlords, while the abolition of the tax in lieu of tithe meant the tenant was, in principle, relieved of the obligation of *asrat* payment. Thus the new policy deprived landowners of income they had customarily enjoyed. Hoben argues that among *rist* holders in Gojjam, the fear of increased taxation was not an important source of apprehension, but what the men found most threatening was that tenants were to be given tax receipts on payment of income tax; such receipts would, they feared, be used by tenants to establish ownership of land (:219). This is supported by Markakis (:382). This fear that tenants would lay claim to land they were farming once they received tax receipts was also true of Wollo as well. The threat of dispossession could thus be taken to be another cause for gentry and peasant discontent.

The uprising in Wollo unfolded in two different forms. The first was the drafting of grievances and the submission of petitions to the authorities. This could be considered non-violent opposition, though, here and there, aggressive acts of confrontation did occur. This form of protest took place in the northern *awrajas* of Wag, Lasta and Raya Qobo. The second was oath taking and the solemn declaration of opposition to the new policy by rebels loosely banded together for that purpose. This was conspiratorial activity, the oaths serving to inflame passions and to attract followers. Here, the agitation took a violent turn and there were incidents of armed confrontation and exchange of fire between rebels and Government forces. The main centres of such agitation were the western *awrajas* of Wadla Delanta and Borena. The protest in Qallu was a subdued affair, and opposition consisted of the refusal to

comply with the law²².

Let us first consider the disturbances that took place in the northern *awrajas*. According to MLRA's report, land in the Wag and Lasta had never been "measured, estimated or classified for taxation purposes" (:46); a fixed tribute was imposed on each locality, and the tribute was distributed among the resident farmers. This may explain in part the widespread opposition to the new legislation and the refusal of most rural people here to pay the new, higher taxes. Between 1968 and 1969, dozens of petitions were written and numerous deputations selected to submit them to the authorities; these individuals frequently travelled all the way to Addis Ababa to deliver their messages. Unfortunately only a few of these letters of protest are preserved in the archives I had access to, though it is clear from internal evidence that the volume of petitions submitted was considerable. Many of the petitions were addressed to the Minister of Interior, the Prime Minister, and the emperor himself. The grievances expressed were frequently similar in content: tax assessment was carried out improperly and by corrupt means; the assessors did not include genuine community leaders but were handpicked by officials of the local government; the tax imposed should thus be revoked and a new assessment properly carried out. Wag protestors in particular emphasized the corrupt practices of local governors.

In the latter part of 1968, and early 1969, Addis Ababa was flooded with delegations from various parts of Wollo, each trying to bring its case to the attention of the authorities. There were deputations not only from the three northern *awrajas* but also from Wore Illu, Borena, Wore Himeno, and Wadla Delanta. The protest was infectious, and it soon aroused the concern of Wollo representatives in Parliament in the capital. In the course of 1969, these M.Ps added their voice to those of the delegations, bombarding the Ministry of Interior, and the Prime Minister's office as well as Parliament with impassioned petitions of their own. The M.Ps went on to actively campaign

22 The discussion to the end of the section is based on Mol files for the years 1960-1962 EC (1967/68-1969/70 GC).

on behalf of their constituents, in Addis Ababa as well as Wollo, for several years.

The petitions submitted to the authorities were often written by a select group of people on behalf of their communities and delivered to the authorities by these same people. The petitions carry the names and signatures of the authors who, we can safely assume, were the leaders of the protests. This tells us something about the social profile of the leaders. Of the 28 signatories of a petition from Lasta, for example, the prominent ones are persons with feudal titles; there are however a large number of clergy, some with senior clerical titles (such as *aleqa*, and *meri-geta*). A good number of the signatures on the petition are thumbprints, indicating that the signatories were illiterate peasants. Of the fourteen signatures on another petition from Wag, ten are thumbprints, and the rest carry the names of titled clergy. Similarly, a petition from Wadla Delanta consists of titled persons (including clergy) and unlettered peasants. In brief, the evidence from the petitions indicates that the active elements in the protests here consisted of the gentry, the clergy and peasants. It is interesting that the clergy were so prominent in the protest movement, particularly in Wag and Lasta. The titled priests were most probably holders of *semon* land which they operated by means of share tenancy; the untitled ones (who are listed as *memrae*) may have been farmers holding Church tenancy.

All through 1968, considerable effort was made at the local level to win the support of the mass of the peasantry in all three *awrajas*. Activists travelled from one community to another advising peasants and others not to pay their taxes and to refuse to have their crops assessed. On occasions, the local police arrested such activists. In one such incident, the police in Wofla *woreda* in Wag arrested four protestors for conducting anti-tax agitation, but the agitators were soon freed by a large crowd of sympathizers who broke into the police station and chased away the police. Such incidents were not infrequent in Wag, and the police were reluctant to take measures to contain the protest for fear of inflaming passions and provoking violent confrontation.

At the end of 1968, some of Wag's deputations in Addis Ababa succeeded in delivering their grievances to the emperor himself who instructed the Minister of Interior that the demands of the people of Wag be carefully considered and a decision given soon. At the beginning of 1969, both the Ministry of Interior and the Wollo provincial administration ruled that the earlier tax assessment in the *awraja* was improper, that new assessment committees should be formed and proper assessment undertaken. This opened the door for a hearing of the protests of the other two *awrajas*, though the hearings did not take place until 1970. This was a victory for the people of Wag, but the others had to continue their struggle for some time before their grievances got a hearing.

The insurrection in western Wollo, on the other hand, took a different course, but here, unlike Wag, there were neither victors nor losers. At the end, the revolt simply ran out of steam, and the communities involved reluctantly allowed their plots to be assessed, though the authorities were careful to include respected community leaders in the assessment committees. But at one point, in early 1969 in particular, the uprising in Borena jolted the provincial administration and revealed how weak and vulnerable the state was at the local level.

The first *awraja* where protest to the tax was mounted was Wadla Delanta. It appears that opposition was brewing as early as the end of February 1968. Certainly, by mid-March the situation had become alarming enough for the Deputy Chief *Enderassie* to travel to the *awraja* to try to defuse the crisis. This did not help improve matters, instead the protest attracted more followers. The archival sources do not provide much detail on the subject, however according to a long report by the chief of the *awraja* police to the chief of the provincial police in Dessie (Megabit 28, 1960 EC), the rebels, whose strength is not given, were reported to have vowed to resist tax assessment and to have called upon everyone to do the same. Their grievances included objections to land measurement and also complaints about the local justice system, which they denounced as corrupt. They were aggressive in their calls for support: they warned that anyone not collaborating with them would have

his oxen slaughtered and his home put on fire. Such was the force of threat of the rebels, the report states, that even the *chiga-shums* were afraid to inform the authorities. In consequence, tax assessors were afraid to carry out their duties for fear of reprisals, and the implementation of the legislation was paralyzed. The centre of rebel activity was identified as Wadla Dawint *woreda*, though the second *woreda* of the *awraja*, Delanta, was also highly disturbed. Accompanying the *awraja* police chief's report was a list of 23 names of persons said to be leaders of the protest movement in Wadla Dawint, and prominent among them were *Blatta* Teshome Bedilu and *Grazmach* Abebe Feleke. So concerned was the Chief *Enderassie*, *Fitawrari* Mammo, by reports of the disturbances in the *awraja* that he wrote to the Minister of Interior asking for a detachment of the Special Police Commando force (known as *Fetno Derash* and based in Addis Ababa) to be sent immediately to the area to maintain public security. It is interesting that the *Enderassie*, who had powers over the *nech lebash*, did not try to use the force to quell the disturbances.

A more powerful rural uprising broke out in Borena *awraja* in August 1968. The centre of the disturbance was Sayint *woreda*, which, as we shall see further down, served as the base for rebels in the Derg period. In the latter part of September 1968, the *awraja* governor sent a report to the *Enderassie* that rebels, who were opposed to the new tax law, were mobilizing a large force and preparing an uprising in the *woreda*. Between then and November, numerous reports poured into the office of the *Enderassie* and the Wollo police chief. Both officials passed on these reports to their respective superiors in Addis Ababa. So serious was the threat of armed conflict in Borena that the Chief of Public Security in Addis Ababa wrote a confidential memo to the Minister of Interior, at the end of October, warning him of the gravity of the situation in Borena. The events in Borena itself, as pieced together from these reports were as follows.

We do not know exactly when the rebels started to mobilize their forces, but by about mid-September they had attracted a large following. The leaders of the movement were

said to be Muneye Boru (sometimes written as Muneye Birru) and Ayalew Zegeye. They are not identified by any title or honorific. We shall meet the first named individual again, as a rebel leader in the period 1975-76; in one of the police reports written in 1976, he is identified as a *grazmach*. On 27 September or thereabouts, the two rebels with a large armed group and considerable peasant following advanced on Mekane Selaam, the *awraja* capital. Near Qey Washa, not too far from the town, they were met by Government forces, presumably the police (the reports do not indicate whether or not the *nech lebash* were involved). After a good deal of exchange of fire, the rebels were forced to turn back. Five days later, the rebels and their large following attempted to over-run the Sayint *woreda* capital, Ajjibar. Again they were met by Government forces outside the town, and after considerable fighting, they were forced to abandon their plans. In both encounters, casualty figures are not given. A few days later, a task force made up of the *awraja* and *woreda* governors, other officials and a group elders were meeting near Ajjibar to discuss ways of diffusing the crisis in the *woreda* when the rebels attacked; the meeting was dispersed but the attempt of the rebels to capture the governors proved unsuccessful.

In the second week of November, the rebels, together with dissidents from the neighbouring provinces of Gojjam and Begemidr, held a meeting on the border of the three provinces, on the confluence of the Beshilo and Abbai rivers, and vowed to continue the struggle. They agreed to spread the revolt to the *awraja* next door, Wore Himeno. Those who refused to join the struggle were threatened with severe punishment, and localities which were pressured to comply with tax assessment by Government forces were to raise the alarm and the rebels would come to their rescue. The people were advised to select their own magistrates to resolve local disputes, and to reject the official justice system. The evidence suggests that no more violent confrontation took place after the abortive invasions of September, but the rebels were in control of the countryside, and no official could visit the rural areas. Indeed, Sayint *woreda* was out of the hands of the government till the

second half of 1969. As a result, the implementation of the law was suspended here and in many parts of the *awraja*.

In the meantime, the *Enderassie* was writing frantically to the Minister of Interior requesting first a platoon later a company of the *Fetno Derash* to deal with the disturbances, but his requests fell on deaf ears. In mid-October, the provincial council, the highest decision making body in the province, held an emergency meeting under the chairmanship of the *Enderassie*. It recommended that the *Enderassie* again formally request the Minister of Interior to immediately send a company of *Fetno Derash* to Borena to put down the disturbances. In case this force proved to be inadequate, it was decided that a brigade of the Dessie-based Territorial Army (ie. the *nech lebash*) should be put on alert. The *Enderassie* attempted to put together a police force of twenty men to send to Borena as a stopgap measure, but since he was unable to meet the expenses, he had to give up the idea. In early January 1969, the *Enderassie* sent a strongly worded letter to the Minister. In it, he declared that if the government failed to send troops to Borena immediately, he would not be responsible for any bloodshed or loss of life in the *awraja*. This was almost an ultimatum. The response from the Minister was that the disturbances should be dealt with by the local police and *nech lebash*. The government had just conducted a campaign to put down the Gojjam uprising which appeared to be more threatening to the state than that of Wollo, and the Minister was not about to commit regular peace-keeping forces here.

Right from the start, Wollo officials maintained that the agitation in Wadla Delanta and Borena was instigated by rebels from neighbouring Gojjam. The evidence, however, does not bear out their allegations. By all accounts, the protest movement in Gojjam began in Mota and Dega Damot, *awrajas* not contiguous with Wollo. The sources provide different dates for the initial confrontation here between rebels and Government forces. Schwab states that the revolt broke out in May 1968, Markakis thinks it is in April, and Gebru and Hoben date it to February. The movement spread south to Bichena and the areas bordering Wadla Delanta and Borena later, though we

are not sure when. By August-September 1968, the protest had died down and conditions had returned to normal. In our case, the records indicate that protest activities were under way in Wadla Delanta in the latter part of February 1968. By the end of March, rebels in the *awraja* had succeeded in gaining considerable support and blocking the implementation of the legislation. It is thus obvious that the unrest in Gojjam had no bearing on the protest here. In Borena on the other hand, protest activity was probably initiated some time in August (I say probably because the sources do not provide precise dates), and the insurrection was in full swing in early September. While this is much later than the uprising in Gojjam, there is no clear evidence that dissidents from Gojjam were responsible for inciting the movement here. Police reports identify several individuals who had crossed over from Gojjam and joined the movement, but even if this was true, it was merely an act of solidarity with fellow rebels.

Just as in the case of the Gojjam revolt, the movement in Borena lost its force and quietly died down. By early January 1970, the *Enderassie* was reporting that tax assessment was under way in western Wollo, including Borena and Wadla Delanta. If any of the rebels were punished or brought before a court of law, the records are silent about it. The government did not announce an amnesty for those involved in the agitations. I believe both sides, rebels and Government, were content to let bygones be bygones. It is striking that despite the apparatus of security at the disposal of the local government -the police and Territorial Army- the authorities were unable to put down the uprisings in Wadla Delanta and Borena. It is not clear why the *awraja nech lebash* was not mobilized to mount an offensive against the rebels, and why the *Enderassie* insisted on troops from outside. The impotence of the provincial administration in the face of what can only be described as small-scale and unorganized uprisings is reflected in the frantic letters the *Enderassie* as well as the Wollo police chief dispatched to their superiors in Addis Ababa.

To round out this part of the discussion, a word here about the participation of the peasantry in the protest move-

ment is in order. I hope it is clear from the above discussion that while the leading elements of the agitations in both northern and western Wollo were the local gentry, the peasantry did play an active role. The protests centred on the tax legislation, but the legislation meant different things to different sectors of the population. To the gentry, the tax was yet another demonstration of the intrusion of the central state in local affairs, encroaching in this particular case, on critical gentry interests and prerogatives. To peasants, the new legislation meant being encumbered with greater tax burdens, forcing them to give up more of their harvest. It is quite likely that tenants supported the protest cause. While the new law would have, in principle, enabled the tenantry to carry a lighter tax burden, knowing the unscrupulousness of their landlords, many tenants would have suspected that the additional tax would be passed on to them. Finally, in the course of the protests, grievances concerning injustices and corruption in the judicial system were aired. These grievances were important to the peasantry.

Land Reform and Agrarian Unrest

From the very beginning, immediately after its seizure of power, the Derg was confronted with a growing political opposition from several quarters. For analytical purposes, the early opposition to the regime (1974 to 1976) may be divided into two groups, viz. the right and left opposition (Dessalegn 1987). The left opposition was urban based, ideologically driven, and its support was among the youth and the literati. The left was opposed to the Derg on the grounds that the regime was not radical (or socialist) enough, that it would not consummate the popular revolution, or that it would impose a military dictatorship. EPRP was the largest and the most notable of this group. The right opposition was mostly rural based and its main supporters were the landed classes. It rejected the radical changes that were initiated by the new regime, of which the most damaging to its interests, and the most far reaching in its consequences was the land reform of 1975. The rural revolt in Wollo, which broke out in the second half of 1975 and con-

tinued for over two years, was a revolt against the land reform, and should thus be considered as part of the right opposition.

The rural unrest following the land reform, which was widespread, has been virtually ignored by students of the Ethiopian Revolution. Except for a passing remark here and there, both Clapham (1988) and Andargachew (1993) have *nothing* to say about it. Halliday and Molyneux (1981) devote a page to the subject, but much of what they wrote is based on hearsay and gossip. Lefort's impressionistic account discusses the unrest in the context of a North/South divide (1983: 100-110). The South, the author argues, which had always been resentful of Northern landlord domination, received the land reform enthusiastically, whereas the North, with its "individual" form of tenure, was unwilling to accept the reform. The landlord opposition to the Derg, we are told, was thus a Northern affair. This is a simplistic view, and we shall show later that the evidence does not support it. Indeed, judging by reports in the government-controlled mass media at the time (our main source of written evidence), there were more incidents of opposition in the South than in the North.

Land Reform

I have dealt with the land reform, its implementation and consequences at some length elsewhere, and I shall not repeat the arguments here (Dessalegn 1984; 1993). I shall try instead to examine some aspects of the reform which are relevant for my purposes here, and which have not received much treatment so far. But first a few words on the nature of the reform is necessary. The land reform was launched on 4 March 1975, but the legislation did not appear in the *Negarit Gazeta* (the official legislative gazette) until the end of April. Formal implementation began in some areas in May but in others several months later. In the more inaccessible areas of north Shoa, western Wollo and eastern Gondar, implementation did not start for a year or more.

The reform *abolished landlordism*, and this, in my view, is its enduring legacy and its greatest achievement. All property

belonging to landlords -gentry and landed nobility alike- was expropriated *without* compensation. Land distribution took place among households organized in Peasant Associations (PAs) in each *kebele*. Peasants had only use rights to the land they received, which they could not transfer to others by sale, lease, rent or mortgage. Tenancy and other forms of subordination based on land ownership were done away with. Political power at the local level was restructured, with the PA assuming authority at the *kebele* level, and "progressive" minded officials newly appointed by the Derg replacing the gentry at the level of the *woreda* and above. Membership in the PAs was open to peasants only, and landlords were barred from participation, thus closing off any chances such persons had of getting control of the organizations and using them for their own purposes. A Judicial Tribunal was also established at the *kebele* level (later at the level of the *woreda*) whose task was to resolve disputes, especially disputes arising from land matters, within peasant communities; this undercut the authority of the judiciary, enabling peasants to deal with their own problems in their own way. What made matters worse for the landed classes was that the reform expropriated not only farm land but forest land, and as many small and medium- sized forests in Wollo were owned by the gentry and the nobility, their expropriation was a serious loss to them. PAs immediately laid claim to woodland in their jurisdictions and soon began to cut down the trees; some of the deforested land was distributed to poor and land-less peasants (MoA archives, 1967 EC, 1974/75 GC). In brief, reform dispossessed and deposed the gentry whose dominant position, as we have seen, had rested on the twin sources of economic and political power.

This radical reform was implemented under rather unusual circumstances. At the time of implementation, the new regime had no strong presence in the rural areas, and it is a measure of the political euphoria of the times that such a far-reaching reform was initiated without giving serious thought to the practicalities of its implementation. The men who prepared the legislation and the authorities who approved it gave very little thought to the problems that would arise in imple-

menting it under the diverse and complex circumstances of the country at the time. There was ample evidence that the landed classes would try to undermine the reform. While many of the powerful nobility were quickly neutralized through arrests and executions at the outset of the Revolution, the local gentry were firmly entrenched in the rural areas and a force to be reckoned with.

Halliday and Molyneux's have argued that the Ethiopian Revolution is best understood as a revolution from above. Their main contention is that profound transformations of "social and political structures can occur in a particular country, meriting the term 'revolutionary' yet initiated and controlled not by a mass movement but by a sector of the pre-existing state apparatus" (:26). The concept is distinguished from *coup d'état* and from mass revolutions or "revolutions from below". Revolutions from above are preceded by popular agitations which prepare the revolutionary situation; such actions both weaken old regimes and politicize "the actual agents of change, the military bureaucracy" (:30). It is not clear at what point the Derg's coup of 1974 became a revolution from above, though they note that the coup took place in the context of a social revolution (:34). Earlier, they had argued that the Ethiopian officer class exhibited virtually no dissidence in the pre-1974 period (:30). The authors' emphasis is that "movements among the people" helped alter the consciousness of the Derg. By "movements among the people" they are referring mainly to the urban agitations that preceded the seizure of power by the Derg.

This is a rather arguable view of the revolutionary process in the country. To begin with, we need to distinguish between the early and latter phase of the Derg. It is in the early, or what I have elsewhere called populist, phase of the Derg (Dessalegn 1987) that the major socio-economic reforms were launched. At this time, the radical option not only had strong appeal among the active, vocal and influential elements of the urban population but was the only option open to the Derg if it was to stay in power. State radicalism also served the new regime as a means of gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the politi-

cally active urban population and of the expectant peasantry. Secondly, the "popular movement" continued for a while after the Derg's accession to power, although it was undertaken in altered form. Here, the Derg was confronted with persistent opposition from the left, and initially its response was to appear more leftist than its opponents, and to try to pull the rug from under them. Some of the radical reforms of the early years were a product of this ideological competition.

Halliday and Molyneux have not in fact fully grasped the profound implications of the land reform, and this explains in part their "top-down" approach, as it were, to the revolutionary process in the country. I shall argue instead that land reform and its implementation set off the popular revolution in the rural areas. The redistribution of land and the consequent destruction of the political and economic power of the landed classes, in particular of the gentry, which was accomplished through popular agitation, including in some areas bloody armed conflict, was part of the agrarian revolution, which broke out in the second half of 1975 and continued, at least in Wollo, until 1977. This was, in a rather peculiar way, a revolution from below, for in large measure it was the work of *zemachoch* (see below), development agents, and peasants. As we shall see further down, peasants in Wollo, where gentry resistance was perhaps the most fierce, paid a heavy price for land reform.

Reform Comes to the Countryside

Shortly before the reform legislation was issued several measures were taken by the Derg which later came to play an important role in the process of agrarian change. In December 1974, the program known as the National Campaign for Development through Co-operation was formally launched. This program (popularly known as *zemecha*; *zemach*, plural *zema-choch* for participants) planned to deploy, mostly in the rural areas, all students and teaching staff in institutions of higher learning, and seniors from all high schools in the country. The objectives remained vague and unclear all through the life of

the program, but the main purpose was to propagate the aims of the Revolution and to win the loyalty and support of the popular classes. The first batch of *zemacha* participants left Addis Ababa for the provinces in early January 1975, and by the end of the year some 57 000 *zemachoch* had been deployed (*Addis Zemen*, 11 Hamle 1968 EC, 18 July 1976 GC). The second measure, which was taken only weeks before the reform legislation was announced, was aimed at dislodging the entrenched provincial bureaucracy of the imperial regime and replacing it with new personnel sympathetic to the goals of the Revolution. In the first two months of 1975, over a thousand men (with one woman as the only exception), both civilian and military, were given appointments and sent to their posts in the provinces. These appointees, called "Apostles of Change" for a time, included provincial, *awraja*, and *woreda* administrators, development agents, and local staff of the Ministry of Land Reform which had offices down to the *awraja* level. By the second half of the year, most of the gentry had lost their posts in the local state structure. Many of the newly appointed officials, particularly those who had direct contact with the peasantry, were fervent advocates of change and played an important role in the ensuing struggle in the rural areas.

Thus, when reform came to the countryside, it came together with what I wish to call "rural activators", consisting of *zemach* students and local development agents (field staff of MLRA, of MoA, and some of the newly appointed "apostles of change"). These were the principal reform agents of the Derg. In place of the disciplined and experienced party cadres who played such a critical role in the successful implementation of the radical land reforms of revolutionary polities such as China and Vietnam (see Moise 1983), the Derg had to make do with a young, inexperienced, ill-disciplined but zealous force of rural activators, hastily assembled and deployed in the countryside. These agents of the Derg were different from what the peasants were familiar with: they spoke a different "language", and expressed solidarity with peasants, the poor and the down-trodden - something unheard of in rural communities before. However, they had no coherent guidelines for the tasks they

shouldered, and no clear objectives to aim for. In consequence, the implementation of the reform was a chaotic affair for the first two years. But it is my view that without the energetic efforts of these activators, it is doubtful if the reform process in the countryside would have been successfully undertaken. Indeed, I submit that though not quite aware of it themselves, these activators succeeded in drawing the peasantry into the agrarian struggle and fanning the flames of the Revolution. It was these rural activators who organized the peasantry, and who enabled it to carry out land distribution.

When the *zemacha* program was initially conceived, there were no definite plans to involve the campaigners in the implementation of the land reform. But by the time the reform legislation was issued, there were already several thousand *zemachoch* deployed in the rural areas²³. MLRA, which was the implementing agency, realized that it could not discharge its duties without a large network of active field agents; its own staff was insufficient for the task. So it turned to the *zemacha* program for support. Many *zemachoch*, in particular the more radical element among them, saw this as a good opportunity to carry out political agitation among the peasantry, much of which was critical of the Derg.

In those heady days after the reform, nobody knew exactly what was to be done, and how to tackle the practical measures of translating the legislation into reality. In the absence of clear guidelines and programs, many *zemachoch* took matters into their own hands. They proceeded to organize Peasant Associations, and to preach armed revolution against the landed classes. In their zeal, they saw themselves as the catalyst of the Revolution, and went on to confront all those they considered to be landlords and feudalists. The property of such persons was summarily expropriated, and this was followed by attempts to disarm them, and on occasions to put them under

23 The discussion that follows is based on my own personal experience. In the latter part of 1975, I had the good fortune to travel in many parts of the country, especially the southern provinces. I visited many *zemecha* camps and talked to numerous *zemachoch*. See also Lefort, Ch. 3.

arrest. Such aggressive action drove some gentry into armed opposition, and others simply fled their homes and went into hiding or were forced to seek the safety of the larger towns. On occasions, however, confrontation led to violence and a good number of *zemachoch* were killed in the process. *Addis Zemen* reported that by the end of the *zemecha* program in 1976, 116 *zemachoch* had lost their lives through "counter-revolutionary" violence, accidents and sickness (11 Hamle 1968). Moreover, the intrepid behaviour of these young activators, and the fright and disarray it caused among the gentry, lent moral courage to the peasants who began to be drawn into the reform movement.

In the first six months of the land reform, some 16,000 PAs with a membership of 3.5 million households were organized. This was a considerable achievement, though some of the organizations were hastily set up and rather ineffective. Initially, *zemachoch* and rural agents were not overly concerned about the quality of their organizational work, what mattered to them was the number of PAs formed. The first round of land distribution was similarly hastily done, with the main emphasis on the distribution of land formerly owned by the landed classes to the poor and the needy. It took a second round of re-organization and redistribution to establish the reform on a firm footing and to dispel any doubts that the old agrarian order was now a thing of the past. However, the first round was significant as a confidence building measure. Many peasants, the poorer ones in particular, who were uncertain of the success of the reform, became enthusiastic supporters when the expected retribution of the landlords failed to materialize, and when, in some areas, they saw the hereditary landlord and the titled personage literally chased out of the countryside.

The relationship between the Derg and the rural activators was not a happy one. The *zemachoch* in particular, zealous and energetic, were eager to fan the flames of the popular agitation in the countryside, whereas the Derg was apprehensive and preferred to calm down peasant fervour lest the situation should get out of control. The controversy came to a head at the end of 1975, when the first harvest after the reform was

being gathered; the issue was whether or not former tenants should pay rent to their landlords. In some areas in Wollo, landlords used intimidation and strong-arm methods to reclaim the rent from their former land. The argument was that the reform came too late to annul the 1975 obligations tenants had to their landlords. Surprising enough, the Derg supported this line of argument, and quietly instructed local officials to persuade peasants to comply with the demands of the landlords. But *zemachoch* and peasants were vehemently opposed to it, and in the end the forces in the field won the day; except in some places where the popular movement was weak, the 1975 harvest became the first harvest to be free of land rent and other obligations to the landed classes.

One should not forget to note that the political terror in the urban areas directed against the right opposition in the early years of the Revolution did contribute to the success of the land reform. All through the first two years of the Revolution, the new regime conducted a virulent political campaign against what it termed "counter-revolution elements", a reference at this time to the landed classes. Members of the aristocracy, retired generals, and wealthy personages were arrested in large numbers, and their property confiscated. Some of these men were later executed. The Derg's "red terror", which was to be unleashed against the left opposition at the end of 1976, actually began soon after the land reform was launched, and the media, particularly the broadcast media, played an important role in this. Throughout much of the year, long official statements, broadcast over the radio and television, fulminating against "elements of the counter-revolution" became a regular feature of the media. The detention or execution of prominent members of the landed classes was given the widest publicity. Indeed, execution and other acts of state terror became an important media event. The nationalization of urban land and rental houses in July 1975, a reform aimed primarily at humbling the propertied classes, further weakened the counter-revolution. In sum, the political offensive against the right opposition was significant for two reasons. First, it disarrayed the opposition and seriously undermined its ability to put up an

effective resistance. Secondly, it strengthened the confidence of the peasantry and encouraged it to be actively involved in the agrarian struggle to defend the gains of the reform.

The Gentry Strike Back: Rebellion in North and South Ethiopia 1975-76

The written evidence indicates that the rural opposition to the Derg did not begin in earnest until the land reform was launched in March 1975; by then the new regime had been in power for some six months. There are no references to "counter-revolutionary activities", the official term for the rural opposition, in either the MoI archives or the government owned newspapers, especially the Amharic daily *Addis Zemen*, before March. Until the MoI provincial archives are opened up to researchers, this newspaper will remain the main documentary source for the gentry insurrections of 1975-77²⁴. The paper carried highly partisan reports of rebel activity to the reform from all over the country. Only successful operations by security forces and/or the peasant militia were reported, and engagements in which the government forces suffered heavy losses or were defeated did not appear in the paper. The reports were one-sided and selective to emphasize Government successes, but they did not reflect a regional bias; thus, we can say that they provide a good picture of the geographical spread of the agitations in these years.

According to reports in the paper, the regions where serious incidents of opposition occurred were the following: Wollo; North Shoa, specially Selale, Tegulet and Bulga, Menz, and Yerer and Kereyu *awrajas* (the *woredas* of Minjar and Shenkora); South Shoa: Chebo and Gurage, and Haiqoch and Butajera *awrajas*; Sidamo province, in particular Sidama, Derassa, and Jemjem *awrajas*; Arssi province; Bale province, in particular Genale and Wabe *awrajas*; Wollega province,

²⁴ Read carefully, *Addis Zemen* is a mine of information. The discussion that follows is based on the paper for the years 1974/75 to 1976/77 GC.

Horro Gudrou *awraja*; West Shoa, in particular Jibatna Mecha *awraja*; Keffa province, Keffa, and Kullo Konta *awrajas*; and, Gondar province, Debre Tabor *awraja*. Of these, the most serious incidents occurred in Wollo, north and south Shoa, Sida-mo, Bale and Keffa provinces. Opposition to the reform was thus widespread, and there was more agitation in the south of the country than in the north. However, almost everywhere, the anti-reform movement was quickly put down - a series of clean-up operations by security forces and armed peasants was sufficient to crush the rebels with limited losses to government forces. The sole exception is Wollo where the rural unrest lasted for two and half years and the cost to both the security forces and the peasantry was very high. We shall be dealing with the unrest in Wollo at some length further down, so let us briefly look at some of the serious episodes in the other areas.

Most of the rebel activity reported in the paper occurred in the months of June to July, September to October 1975, and July to September 1976. There are no reports of rebel activity in Wollo until September-October, whereas many of the reported incidents in the rest of the country took place in June and July of 1975. We shall see later, however, that there was rebel activity in Wollo much earlier than reported here.

The first reported incident of opposition to appear in the paper took place in Selale *awraja*, north Shoa, some ten days after the reform was announced. The rebel leaders were identified as three brothers, two *dejazmach* and one *fitawrari*, who were said to be big landlords. There is precious little detail about their activities, except to say that they were determined to resist the reform by force of arms. The rebels and a handful of their followers were subsequently killed in action by the security forces. This is typical of the reports in the paper: very little detail is given, and one is not sure what the aims and objectives of the rebels are, how well or poorly they were organized and armed, and how they hoped to accomplish their purpose. On many occasions, the strength of the rebel force is not given, only the number of men killed or captured by security forces. The rebels are invariably described as counter-revolutionaries, feudal or bourgeois landlords (*gultegna* or *yemeret kebertie*, re-

spectively). The security forces, supported by armed peasants (later, the rural militia) often conducted a series of *assessa* in a given area to clean out opposition forces; *assessa*, a term employed very frequently, roughly means a clean-up operation, a kind of search and destroy mission. On many occasions the security forces consisted of the local police, however, in times when large-scale operations were mounted, the government deployed either the *Fetno Derash*, or specially trained commando troops, or both.

There were several reports of opposition activity in Chebo and Gurage *awraja*, south Shoa, in the months of July to September 1975; the activities were centred in Ameya *woreda*. The reports state that the rebels were opposed to the land reform and the Revolution, and were engaged in insurrectionary activities. One of their leaders is identified as Mulugetta Ejeta (no honorific or title given), and his assistant, said to be a former judge, as Tesfaye Bayou; both men are described as "bourgeois landlords". The two leaders, together with eighteen of their followers were killed and twenty-four others captured in the *assessa* conducted in early July. We are not told what exactly the rebels were doing, but it does appear that gentry from the neighbouring districts had taken cover in a forested area in the *woreda* from where they had carried out anti-government activities. Some of the rebels may have been landlords chased out of their localities by zealous *zemachoch*. More *assessa* by security forces and armed peasants from the surrounding PAs was carried out in the months of August and September when several groups of rebels were either captured or gave themselves up.

In Sidamo, gentry opposition and the government's response to it was on a much bigger scale. The centre of rebel activity was the Ourga forest in Jemjem *awraja*, bordering two other *awrajas*, Sidama and Derassa. The size of the rebel force is not given but it must have been quite considerable since the authorities claim to have mobilized a force of 40,000 peasants for a campaign against the rebels. A series of *assessa* was conducted by the combined force of armed peasants and security forces from late June to late September 1975; the rebels were

surrounded on all sides and attacked from all three *awrajas*. Among their leaders, *Balambaras* Bekele Dembi, Ato Wolde-Senbet Sirsa, *Kegnazmach* Ayele G. Giorgis, *nech lebash* captain Tefera Cherinet, and Ato Hulekae Gelcha are identified by name; there were also several lawyers among them. The first three men were said to be feudal landlords, and the last a local *qoro*. Of the approximately 120 rebels that were subsequently captured in several operations around the forest in the course of the three months, nine were reported to be *qoras*, and twenty four "bourgeois landlords". At the end of the campaign in September, the death toll among the rebels was given as ten, but no casualty figures were given for the government side; large quantities of automatic weapons, ammunition, medical supplies and cattle were also captured. As usual, the objectives and activities of the rebels are not disclosed, the reports merely stating that the men were opposed to the land reform.

The paper carried similar reports of *assessas* conducted by local security forces against anti-reform rebels in Bale and Keffa provinces. In both cases, most of the men identified as leaders of the agitations were local residents and not landlords of northern origin. In mid-1976, for example, an armed rebel force in Keffa province, Kullo Konta *awraja* was active for several weeks, intimidating peasants, attacking and disbanding PAs, and destroying peasant property. The *awraja* police force was unable to put down the unrest, and security forces from Jimma, the provincial capital (probably regular troops from the army camp located there), had to be sent to the area. The protest was finally crushed by the security forces and the rebels were reported to have lost twenty four men. The leaders were identified as *Balambaras* Gezahegn Gebera and Ato Marouf Gebera, brothers and former local landlords.

In June 1976, the Derg formally established a peasant militia force (called the People's Army) throughout the rural areas. *Addis Zemen* states that the force numbered half a million men but this is probably an exaggeration. The force was to replace the *nech lebash*, and, like the latter before it, one of its main tasks was to put down rural rebellions. It was organized as an independent force with its own weapons systems and com-

manding officers. The Derg must have realized that it would be impossible to contain local opposition movements by the regular security forces alone, and an armed militia force in the rural areas was essential. The idea was to enable the peasantry to defend itself and the gains of the Revolution. As we shall see later in the discussion on Wollo, however, the peasant militia, ill-trained, ill-equipped and poorly led, proved to be, at least initially, ineffective against a determined and mobile band of rebels.

The Gentry Strike Back: Rebellion in Wollo 1975-77²⁵

One of the first acts of the Derg after it seized power in September 1974 was to appoint new personnel to posts in both the central and provincial government. While no restructuring of provincial administration was undertaken at this point, the special status of Wollo, whose administration was vested in the Crown Prince, was abolished, and military men were appointed as administrators at all levels of the province. The Derg in fact placed Wollo under military administration on the grounds that the province was suffering from drought and famine. Just as at the time of the imperial regime, Wollo's governing elite were titled men with strong feudal interests, so under the new military regime, the power structure at the provincial, *awraja* and *woreda* levels was dominated by the military. The chief administrator of the province was now Colonel Getahun Ejjiugu, and all *awraja* administrators were majors or major-equivalents, except in Lasta (see Annex 1); similarly, non-commissioned officers were appointed as *woreda* administrators except in a few cases where the posts were occupied by lieutenants.

In the first year of the Revolution, there was considerable confusion and uncertainty within local government in

25 My archival sources in this section consist of: reports by the Wollo Police (Dessie) to police headquarters (Addis Ababa); reports by the Wollo Security office (Dessie) to the Security Department in the MoI; reports by the Wollo administration to MoI; and confidential messages by the chief and deputy chief administrators of Wollo to the Derg.

the province because the new appointees were unfamiliar with their duties, and the old staff were apprehensive about the radical political changes that were taking place in Addis Ababa. Indeed, among civil servants, the police, and the business elite in the outlying *awrajas* and districts, there was anxiety mixed with panic. Dire rumours of conspiracy, unrest and the breakdown of law and order were rife. Reports from the *awraja* and *woreda* police in these areas speak of imminent insurrection and social anarchy, and make urgent requests for protection. The police in the western *awrajas* were particularly fearful, and some of those in the remoter *woredas* left their posts and moved to the *awraja* capitals for greater safety. Many of these *awrajas* had very poor communication, and since most people did not know what was happening in Addis Ababa or the rest of Wollo, the popular imagination created all sorts of alarming stories. Many feared the deposition of the emperor, which was public knowledge even in the most remote districts, would lead to anarchy and civil war. The police here were particularly anxious because in the rainy season the areas' poor roads became impassable and western Wollo is thus cut off from the rest of the province, making it ideal for bandit and rebel activity. Most of the rumours later turned out to be false, but the repeated pleas by the *awraja* and *woreda* authorities for additional security forces for protection continued all through the early years of the Revolution. The provincial authorities, including the chief administrator and the chief of police, also added their voice, and the Derg was bombarded with these insistent requests for several years. Earlier, in January 1975, Major Atnafu Abate, the second most powerful man in the Derg at the time, had authorized the deployment of a rapid deployment force in Dessie to put down disturbances and to be a protective shield against political unrest and insurrection. Some units of this force (it was a company of air-borne troops) were later moved to Lalibela when this historic town was threatened by large-scale disturbances in March of the same year. However, a force of this size was inadequate to provide protection to a province as large and as inaccessible as Wollo.

One of the early victims of the Revolution was the *nech*

lebash. With the restructuring of the old order, this paramilitary force lost its authority and, above all, its economic rationale. While some of its men and officers, specially those in the Dessie area, remained on duty or on call up until the force was eventually replaced by the militia in the latter part of 1977, many *nech lebash* in the *awrajas* quietly dissociated themselves from the force, and some of the officers later joined the opposition against the Derg. It was the land reform which was in the end responsible for the collapse of the force: officers as well as men lost the land they had held as payment for their services, much of which they had earlier converted to freehold with the blessing of the emperor. Without the land, there no longer was any justification for their continued services, and so in many places, the *nech lebash* simply refused to carry out their routine duties, and the police were severely handicapped as a result. Naturally, the *nech lebash* were opposed to the Revolution, so too, in large part, were the local police, but the latter, as agents of law enforcement, were caught in a difficult, frequently hazardous position. They could not abandon their posts for fear of punishment for dereliction of duty. On the other hand, they were the prime targets of armed opposition, and in the years under discussion, many policemen lost their lives, and for a cause they did not believe in.

A contributing factor to the growth and spread of agrarian unrest in Wollo was the famine of 1973/74. This is not the place to debate the question whether the famine played any significant role in the collapse of the imperial regime, but it is obvious that the food crisis aggravated conditions in the rural areas and created a climate of resentment, instability and a measure of lawlessness which contributed to unrest and social agitation. When the political uprising which eventually sealed the fate of the imperial regime broke out in Addis Ababa in 1974, Wollo was in the throes of one of the worst famines in its history (Dessalegn 1991 for details). Thousands of peasants died of hunger, tens of thousands were dislocated or made homeless, thousands more were reduced to abject poverty. While relief assistance was provided at the time by voluntary organizations and the government as well, it was not adequate

to meet the huge demand, and many of the poor were forced to search for ways to secure means of sustenance, including unlawful activity. In the period immediately after the Revolution, in 1975-76 in particular, there were thus a large number of men in rural Wollo who had no fixed employment and who were willing to engage in anything, including violent activity, which promised material gain. As we shall see later, many of the rebel groups in the west and the north of the province attracted large crowds of unarmed or ill-armed peasants who followed them for a chance at looting and robbery.

Largely on account of the famine, but also due to the long standing friction and antagonism, the tension simmering between the highland agriculturalists along the eastern edge of the escarpment in north and central Wollo (the eastern parts of the *awrajas* of Raya Qobo, Yejjju, Ambassel and Qallu), who were mainly Oromo speakers, and the lowland Afar pastoralists erupted into violence in the period under discussion. These two communities, which often competed for the same scarce resource, had a long history of conflict which frequently broke out into violence in times of social and environmental crisis. The violence in this case, which consisted of armed raiding and counter-raiding, pitched battles, and pillage and destruction, was unusually bloody and long-drawn out, lasting roughly from 1974 to 1978. In April 1975, for example, the Raya Qobo *awraja* police reported to the provincial police in Dessie that in Qobo *woreda* there was a day-long battle between Oromo highlanders and Afar pastoralists, and that at the end of the day the highlanders had lost fifty-nine of their men, a list of which was included in the report; casualties among the Afar was not given but they must have been equally high. The attempt by local authorities to resolve the conflict and to reconcile the two communities proved unsuccessful. The police feared that the communal violence would lead to public disorder and lawlessness. While the evidence is inconclusive, there is reason to believe that the rural agitation in north Wollo took advantage of or was encouraged by the conflict between the two communities.

Many peasants in Wollo were not aware that a radical

land reform had been legislated and was about to be implemented until *zemachoch* and other rural activators came and informed them about it. The first batch of *zemecha* participants arrived in the province in January 1975, and were deployed in the rural areas soon after. By the end of the year, there were a total of 2000 *zemachoch* distributed mostly in central Wollo; this was much less than the *zemecha* force planned for the province. Only a small number of *zemecha* participants were stationed in the western or northern *awrajas* due to intense rebel activity, and because many of the areas here were not under government control until long after the *zemecha* program was terminated. At the close of 1975, a total of about 1700 PAs were organized in the province as a whole, but a good number of these were hastily set up and inactive.

In those areas where *zemachoch* were not deployed, the task of organizing the peasantry fell to extension agents and officials of the Ministries of Agriculture and Land Reform. A year later, at the end of 1976, the number of PAs in government registers had risen to 2100, but in Lasta, Wadla Delanta, Wore Himeno, and Borena *awrajas*, the number of PAs was much less than in the other *awrajas* of the province. As we shall see later, these four *awrajas* came to be the grave-yard of PAs all through the period under discussion. That the PAs were set up hastily was reflected in the leadership of the organizations. In many areas, PA leaders were made up of small landowners, titled persons, and the clergy; tenants and poor peasants were poorly represented. The Wollo authorities were aware of this anomaly, and calls for the re-organization of the PAs were voiced from early on, though such re-organization did not take place until 1977 or later. In sum, the reform was implemented at different times in different parts of the province and had different outcomes. In central Wollo (ie. Dessie Zuria *awraja*, parts of Ambassel and Qallu), the first round of land distribution and peasant organization took place from about the middle of 1975; in the more rebellious areas, particularly the four *awrajas* noted above, and also in many areas of northern Wollo, reform was not undertaken until 1977 or 1978.

The archival evidence indicates that the reform was not

enthusiastically received in all parts of the province, and that in some of the *rist* areas it was unpopular and was resisted. We are not certain whether the rejection was based on a clear understanding by peasants of the content of the reform, or because of the way it was presented to them either by the rural activators, or by opponents of the reform. On the other hand, all over the rural areas, the reform became a cause of bitter conflict between tenants and landowners, especially small owners who were themselves working peasants. These landowners wanted to evict the tenants on their land for fear that the latter will lay claim to it, while tenants refused to be evicted on the grounds that the reform had granted the land to them. In some areas, tenants also refused to pay rent to the landowner justifying their decision again on the reform. These conflicts were widespread both in the areas where the reform was implemented as well as in those where it was not. Thus in 1975 and 1976, there was a sharp drawing of class lines in rural Wollo, and aggressive confrontation between the poor and the well-to-do. There are numerous police reports of violent and bloody clashes all over the province between tenants and poor peasants on the one hand, and landowners and rich peasants on the other in the two years after the reform.

The rumble of rebellion began to be heard a few months after the land reform was proclaimed, in May and June. By the third quarter of 1975, violent opposition had erupted in many areas in western Wollo, and a short while later, a similar opposition broke out in Wag and Lasta in northern Wollo, which also affected Raya Qobo. These were areas, we should note, where there were only a few *zemachoch*, and where there was very little attempt to implement the land reform. There was also unrest in Albuko *woreda*, in the western part of the *awraja* of Qallu²⁶. For the Wollo authorities, the most difficult period was the last

26 I have left out the opposition movement by the Afar in Aussa. Ali Mirra, the traditional sultan of the Afar, led a revolt against the Derg in April 1975. In the last quarter of the same year, EPLF armed and supported Ali Mirra's forces which became active in northeast Wollo and central Yeju. This is a complicated subject and I do not have sufficient documentation to discuss it adequately.

quarter of 1975 and the first half of 1976, when virtually the whole of western Wollo and a good portion of northern Wollo was engulfed in violent upheaval, and when the security forces were put under intense pressure. Gentry opposition continued, though sporadically, through the first half of 1977, but by then the rebel movement was losing its force, and many of the widely known rebel leaders were either killed or captured. Significantly, just as the gentry movement was winding down, and the surviving rebels were turning themselves into "bandits", northern Wollo became the active centre for armed opposition, by organized insurgent movements such as the EPRP, TPLF and EPLF. From early 1977, the police reports from these areas begin to give more emphasis to the activities of the "Fronts" than to those of the gentry-led opposition.

Who were the rebels and what were they fighting for? I shall not offer a definitive answer to the question, for no such answer is possible with the evidence at my disposal. From the police and security reports in the MoI archives I compiled a list of 113 names of rebels and rebel leaders (a partial list is given in Annex 2). Some of these persons have titles or military rank, and others do not; some are identified by profession (eg. a former judge, M.P, governor, etc..), others have no such identification. I left out a few names that appear in the files because I suspected these were bandits or common criminals and not rebels against the Derg. Of the total number of names in my list, a little under one-third (30 percent) carry feudal titles ranging from *balambaras* to *dejazmach*; a good number of these were identified in the files as *mikitl woreda*, *woreda*, and *awraja* governors, and M.Ps under the imperial regime. Some 12 percent have military rank (officers and NCOs), and all or almost all of these were *nech lebash*. Of the rest of the persons on the list, a considerable number were identified as judges, and high officials in the *woreda* and *awraja* administration (principal secretaries, directors, etc..). In brief, what we have here is the rural elite, the gentry, which only recently had strong landed interests, high civil and military status, and powerful administrative posts.

We do not know whether the rebels articulated their

objectives and the justifications for their opposition in some coherent and understandable form for the benefit of their followers and sympathizers. Certainly, they did not distribute any political manifestos or protest declarations, nor did they leave behind, in writing, any opinion or statement which could be used to reconstruct their political or social outlook -at least none have been preserved in the MoI archives I had access to. Traditional rebel movements do not articulate ideological viewpoints but attempt to appeal to the rural population by emphasizing customary rights and obligations. Such movements rely on oral communication, for in a society where very few people are literate, the written word is a liability, not an asset. But here and there, police reports and other archival documents contain crude statements, which are attributed to some of the rebel leaders. According to one such police report, Gugsä Ambaw, the most forceful rebel leader in northern Wollo, is said to have told his followers that the new government is "out to profane your religion and desecrate your churches [the region is predominantly Christian]; it has plans to confiscate your land, your cattle and any other property you may have". This view that the new government is preparing to confiscate people's property was common currency, and it was also echoed by rebel leaders in the western *awrajas*. In some areas, rebels characterized the Derg as a government of heathens that was bent on defiling the people's religion. Very frequently, particularly in the western *awrajas*, rebels strongly advised the rural population to choose their own magistrates and to make a complete break with the formal justice system. According to the affidavit given to the police in Dessie in October 1975 by Judge Teshome Abebe (a *woreda* judge from Wore Himeno), who was captured by rebels and spent several days with them on the march, *Fitawrari* Ali Farris, one of the most powerful rebel leaders in western Wollo, expressed his beliefs as follows: customary rules of authority should be respected; all tenants should respect their obligations to the land owner; we cannot sit idly by when our land and property is confiscated. *Fit* Ali thought the Derg was a "government of Gurages and Shanqilas", meaning, presumably, people of low status and disreputa-

ble character. He was certain the emperor did not die a natural death but was murdered by poison by those who usurped his authority. He believed the Crown Prince would soon return and assume power. Many of the gentry rebels owed their important position in the provincial administration before the Revolution to the Crown Prince, and some of them continued to be loyal to him even when his chances of regaining power were negligible.

It is interesting that some of the views of the rebels turned out to be prophetic. The Derg, as we know, went on to confiscate peasant land to promote collectivization. While the desecration of places of worship was not actively encouraged, the military government was less than friendly to religious institutions and religious life. Indeed, churches and other property belonging to some Protestant denominations were later confiscated. Moreover, we now know that the emperor was indeed murdered by Mengistu Haile Mariam and his henchmen. But, I should hasten to note, lest the Wollo gentry should be credited with extraordinary omniscience, that playing on the fears of the rural population by traditional rebels, particularly fears of the loss of their property and the profanation of their religion, has a long history in this part of the country.

It should be noted that in some areas the rebel cause was supported, at least initially, by a good section of the rural population. This was true in Wag, for example, where Gugsä Am-baw had wide following. Similarly, rebels had strong support in parts of Wadla Delanta, in Wore Himeno (Legambo *woreda* in particular), Borena (Sayint *woreda*), and Wore Illu (Leghehida *woreda*). However, as the fighting and civil unrest dragged on, and as the rebels began to indiscriminately attack peasants and burn their homes and crops, the rural population, including their strongest supporters, became weary and turned against them. Traditional rebels do not seek to win the support of the peasantry but rather impose themselves on it. They frequently employ strong arm methods - violence, arson, confiscation and slaughter of cattle- to intimidate rural communities which are reluctant to be drawn in or to provide support. This was true of the gentry rebels of western Wollo, especially from the lat-

ter part of 1976. Moreover, the breakdown of law and order, which accompanied the fighting, provided ample opportunities to bandits and common criminals for robbery and pillage; some individuals also used the occasion to settle old scores. All this further embittered the peasantry.

In what follows, I shall present a brief narrative of the main events in Wollo in the period under discussion.

The first outbreak of armed insurrection occurred in Lasta, instigated by *Dejazmach* Berhane Mesqel Desta. A Lastan by birth, and one time governor of Lasta and Yeju, the *dejazmach* was a powerful presence in the *awraja*. From the early days of the Revolution, the new *awraja* officials were fearful of him and suspicious of his activities, occasionally reporting to the authorities in Dessie that he was fomenting an insurrection. On 14 March 1975, he and his forces attacked Lalibela, the *awraja* capital, and quickly over-ran it. The police, who attempted to defend the town, were easily overpowered, losing several of their men in the fighting. His forces destroyed the airport, set fire to a passenger aircraft parked there, and wrecked the police station and several government offices. The town was ransacked and looted by crowds of peasants that had accompanied the rebel force and by urban mobs. The *dejazmach* later withdrew from the town when government troops were sent against him. The Mol archives are silent about him after this, but oral informants' report that from Lalibella he moved to Sekota, capital of Wag *awraja*, which he attacked and over-ran. He then proceeded to Korem with the aim of capturing the town and cutting off the Dessie-Asmara road, however, here he suffered a serious defeat at the hands of the security forces. Having managed to escape capture, he subsequently made his way to the Sudan and into exile. The anti-Derg opposition in northern Wollo subsided for a while until, a year later, Gugsu Ambaw raised the banner of insurrection in Wag *awraja*.

Just as at the time of the anti-tax revolt during the imperial regime, Wadla Delanta was again in the forefront of opposition activity. Between March and May 1975, there is considerable mobilization of opposition forces in the *awraja*. Graz Hailu Barento, an M.P from the *awraja*, and his brother Bal

Demissie Barento, raised and armed a force of some 60 followers. At the same time, *Kegn Assefa Tareqegn*, former governor of the *awraja*, assisted by *Graz Melaku Kassaw*, was also putting together an opposition force. By June, the two rebel groups, both of which were based in Delanta *woreda*, had joined forces, made up of over 100 men, with the *kegnazmach* as the leader. In the meantime, in Wadla Dawint *woreda*, which borders on Lasta, *Kegn Mekuria Zegeye's* rebel force, whose strength is not given in the reports, clashed with security forces and was badly beaten. The *kegnazmach* and 31 of his followers were killed in the engagement, and the rest of his men fled in disarray. In both *woredas* (the *awraja* consists of only two), the police and other government officials abandoned their posts and fled to Wogel Tena, the *awraja* capital, for safety, and thus, without firing a shot by the rebels, much of the *awraja* was abandoned by government forces.

In neighbouring Wore Himeno, the agitation in mid-1975 was relatively subdued, however *Fit Ali Farris*, one time governor of the *awraja*, was reported to be actively preparing an insurrection. In contrast, in Sayint *woreda*, Borena *awraja*, which borders both Wore Himeno and Wadla Delanta, the opposition movement was under way by early July. In the latter part of the month, rebels tried unsuccessfully to over-run Ajjibar, the *woreda* capital. In the same week, the *awraja* administrator sent frantic messages to Dessie asking for troops to be air-lifted to the *awraja* by helicopter, otherwise, he feared, the government would face a humiliating defeat by the counter-Revolutionary forces preparing to attack the *awraja* capital. The administrator's report identified the rebel leaders as Kertema Gizaw, Muneye Birru and Demissie Merawi; later reports refer to the last two persons as *grazmach*. The reader may recall that Muneye (his second name written as Borru) was one of the leaders of the uprising against the agricultural tax at the time of the imperial regime (see above). On the other hand, in Legehida *woreda*, Wore Illu *awraja*, *Kegn Mekonnen Assen*, former M.P. from the same *awraja*, was said to be fomenting insurrection in July. In August, the *awraja* police report that *zemecha* participants are engaged in disarming and confiscat-

ing the property of the local gentry in Wore Illu *woreda*, one of the three *woredas* of the *awraja*. The reports speak of these incidents with great alarm. In sum, by the second half of 1975, the drum of insurrection is beating loudly in western Wollo, while Lasta had just experienced a foretaste of what was to come later.

At the start of the Ethiopian year 1968 (September-October 1975), there was an explosion of insurrectionary activity, especially in western Wollo. One by one, the *awrajas* noted above fell to gentry rebels, which caused panic and desperation among senior officials in the provincial administration. The frantic appeals of Col. Getahun, the chief administrator, his deputy, as well as the chief of police, to the MoI and the Derg in Addis Ababa for more security forces, including helicopter units and aerial bombardment of key rebel strongholds, fell mostly on deaf ears. The forces at their disposal were woefully inadequate to meet the danger that seemed to appear from all directions.

At the time in question, the security forces in Wollo consisted of two platoons of *Fetno Derash* (police commando force), a company of air-borne troops, and a small infantry unit which was based in Korem in Raya Qobo. As noted above, some of the air-borne troops were sent to Lalibela to defend the historic town, and to pre-empt any threat to the main Dessie-Asmara road. In the last quarter of 1975 and the first half of 1976, it was mainly the local police and armed peasant guards (where PAs had been formed) which were used to defend the major towns and strategically important points; both forces suffered heavy casualties in most of the engagements with the rebels. In June 1976, the peasant militia was established, but it was not until 1977 that it was adequately armed. In the last quarter of 1976, two companies of *Nebelbal*, an anti-guerrilla force specially trained by the Israelis whom the Derg secretly engaged for the purpose (see Gilkes), was deployed in north Wollo. But by this time, the air-borne troops had been recalled, which left the *Fetno Derash* as the only trained force to deal with the counter-Revolution in central and western Wollo.

When the Derg finally responded to the litany of requests

for more troops, it was to say that the Revolution was under pressure from many quarters, and that it could not spare any troops for duty in Wollo. It recommended that the authorities use the peasant militia to put down rebel activities. In 1977, the Ogaden war broke out, with the Somali forces quickly penetrating deep into Ethiopian territory and threatening the major cities in Harrarghe province. Most of the Derg's regular forces, and a large force formed from the newly established militia (over 200 thousand according to the government at the time but Gilkes disputes the figure), were deployed to stop the Somali advance.

The whole of Wadla Delanta was under rebel control by the end of September 1975. *Kegn Assefa's* smashed his way into Wogel Tena, the *awraja* capital, on 26 September and his forces and the crowd of peasants that accompanied him looted and destroyed the town. The *kegnazmach*, whose ultimate aim was to attack and capture Dessie, quickly proceeded towards the provincial capital, over-powering the weak defences of peasant guards hastily set up by the government along the way. In central Ambassel *awraja*, in the rugged terrain of Mariyae sub-district, Tehuledere *woreda*, a big force of rebels, over 500 armed men according to one report, led by *Fit Mekonnen Melaku*, former governor of Wore Himeno, was also heading towards Dessie at about the same time. Just south of Mariyae town, the rebels were met by a government force consisting of the *woreda* police and peasants, and led by the *woreda* administrator and police chief; in a short but sharp engagement, the government forces were decisively routed, and the administrator, the police chief, and several police and peasants were killed. The victorious rebels continued on their way to Dessie, and a platoon of *Fetno Derash* carrying heavy artillery was sent to stop them. The commando's mission was however inconclusive because the rebels refused to give battle and withdrew to safer ground in the mountains. At this time, the whole of the border area between Wadla Delanta and Ambassel *awrajas* was a scene of heavy skirmishes, with the rebels having the upper hand.

Meanwhile in Borena, rebel forces launched an attack on Ajjibar, capital of Sayint *woreda*, on 22 September. The town

was defended, as usual, by a government force of police and armed peasants and led by the *woreda* administrator. Fierce fighting lasting two whole days took place at the end of which the rebels managed to over-power the defenders and over-run the town. Casualties on both sides are not known, but Major Assefa Berhe, the *awraja* administrator, in his report to Col. Getahun in Dessie, speaks of the "massacre" of government forces in the engagement; the *woreda* administrator was one of the men killed. Major Assefa led a commando force and attempted to come to the rescue of the defenders but, according to his report, he was ambushed near the scene of the battle and he and his men were able to escape with only light casualties. He was later accused of cowardly conduct in battle and removed from his post. A week later, the rebels attacked Mekane Se-laam, the *awraja* capital, but were unable to capture it. Ajjibar town and Sayint *woreda* remained in rebel hands for nearly ten months.

In Wore Himeno, *Fit Ali's* forces easily over-powered the government forces defending the *awraja*. He over-ran Tenta, the *awraja* capital, and later Masha and Aquesta, two important *woreda* towns. All three towns were said to have been looted and wrecked by the rebels and their followers. By mid-October, the whole of the *awraja* was under his control. In Wore Illu, Legehida *woreda* was wrested out of government hands by the forces led by *Kegn* Mekonnen Assen. The *woreda* was not brought under government control for over six months. In brief, by mid-October 1975, close to half the territory of Wollo was out of government control, and the local security forces (ie. the police and the peasantry which was co-opted for service) had suffered heavy casualties.

The dramatic developments in this period culminated in the battle of Kuta Ber which took place between October 11 and 12. Kuta Ber town, the capital of the *woreda* of the same name in Dessie Zuria *awraja*, is only about 20 kms from Dessie. From the time Wogel Tena fell to *Kegn* Assefa's forces, it was known that the rebels would proceed to Dessie. As they approached nearer, the authorities in Dessie became increasingly alarmed. They were fearful that pretty soon Dessie, Haiq

and Woldiya would fall into rebel hands, and the Dessie-Asmara road, the life-line of the north of the country, would be cut-off. Partly out of desperation, they mobilized peasants to stop the rebels all along their route, but this proved futile. The *kegnazmach's* forces, now swelled by dissident gentry, *nech lebash* officers, and poorly armed crowds of peasants, swept through these defences until they reached the outskirts of Kuta Ber town. Here, they were joined by *Fit* Mekonnen Melaku and his forces and *Fit* Belay Zelelew (see above). According to a confidential letter to Col. Getahun by Major Tessema Waqjira, the administrator of Dessie Zuria *awraja*, written on 30 Tiqimt 1968 (10 November 1975), nearly a month after the battle, ten thousand peasants were deployed to defend the *woreda* from the rebels; of these, however, only six hundred carried firearms. In addition, there were units of the *Fetno Derash* and air-borne troops on stand-by in Dessie. The strength of the rebels is not given, though in one report it was estimated that they had a following of "many thousand" men. The peasant defenders were unable to stop the rebel advance which proceeded rapidly to the town burning homes and destroying rural property in the process. As the *kegnazmach* threatened to over-run Kuta Ber, the government decided to commit the *Fetno Derasha* and air-borne troops. There are no details of the ensuing battle, we only know that it took place over two days, and the security forces made use of heavy artillery, an advantage the rebels did not enjoy. At the end of the second day, the rebels were decisively beaten, with heavy losses on their side. They lost seven of their main leaders, including *Kegn* Assefa and *Fit* Belay. Casualty figures among "the security forces and peasants" were given as 35 deaths and a small number of wounded - a very low figure by my estimation. It is obvious from Major Tessema's letter that casualties among peasants must have been considerably high though the major is careful not to discuss the subject. Most of the government's reports however place strong emphasis on the destructive nature of the rebel campaign. In the period between October 1 to 10, hundreds of peasant homes were said to have been put on fire and innumerable cattle looted.

Thus ended the attempt of the Wollo gentry to defeat

the Revolution. Though the agitation continued in the western and northern *awrajas*, in some instances with greater intensity, there was no more concerted effort to mount a campaign against Dessie, the power centre of the Revolution. Instead, rebels directed their attacks against organized peasantry, and *awraja* and *woreda* towns.

Buoyed by its success in the battle of Kuta Ber, the government sent its crack air-borne troops to Wore Himeno and Wadla Delanta to re-establish government control over these areas. But the task proved more difficult than anticipated. The *assessas* the troops mounted in both *awrajas* from October to December was on occasions costly to them. The rugged terrain in both areas was advantageous to the rebels, and the troops sustained casualties. Wogel Tena, the capital of Wore Himemo was finally brought under government control on 14 November. But much of the western regions of both *awrajas* continued to be under rebel control. Here, the main rebel group which continued to operate in 1976 and the early part of 1977 was the one led by *Fit* Mekonnen Melaku who was supported by the *nech lebash* colonel Tadesse Seralign and his forces. The troops' campaign in Wore Himeno to engage and defeat *Fit* Ali was unsuccessful because he avoided open combat with them. Many of the followers of *Kegn* Assefa who had fought in Kuta Ber joined the *fitawrari* and he now began to move to Borena, Wadla Delanta and across the border to Gondar province at will, sacking small towns, harassing government forces, and attacking PAs. In December, the air-borne troops were recalled from the two *awrajas*, and what their mission had accomplished was to free the capitals of the two *awrajas* from rebel control - hardly a brilliant success.

Meanwhile in Albuko *woreda*, western Qallu *awraja*, which borders on both Wore Illu and the mountainous *awraja* of Menz and Gishe in Shoa province, an unprising organized by *Graz* Teffera Lulseged, former M.P. from Qallu, and Zewde Demissie broke out in early 1976. With a small force of some 30 men, the rebels captured Degaga, the *woreda* capital in April. With Menz and Gishe as their sanctuary, they went on to harass the local forces of the government and attack PAs

in southern Qallu. The mountainous border region adjoining the three *awrajas* of Menz and Gishe, Wore Illu, and western Qallu was, traditionally, bandit country; and some of the rebel groups active in this part of Wollo made common cause with well-known bandits. One such bandit, a colourful character, was *Sindew Sheikh Yahya*. A native of Legehida *woreda*, the most rebellious *woreda* in Wore Illu, he was the son of a Moslem religious teacher. For reasons we do not know, he had taken to banditry in the 1960s, but at the outbreak of the rebel movement in Wore Illu in 1975, he joined the forces of *Kegn Mekonnen Assen*, later those of *Fit Ali* when the latter was active in Borena. In the latter part of 1976, Sindew led his own force and was active also in Borena and Wore Himeno. Both he and *Kegn Mekonnen* crossed over to Menz and Gishe when they were strongly pressed by government forces. He continued to be a thorn on the government's side long after many of the well-known rebel leaders had been killed or captured.

From the latter part of 1976, the archival sources give greater emphasis to rebel activities in northern Wollo. The most important rebel leader to emerge here is Gugsä Ambaw, who with support from Teffera Mengistu, had virtually full control of the *awraja* of Wag for nearly a year. The records are silent about the identity and background of both these leaders, but until the first months of 1977, Gugsä and Teffera operated freely in Wag where they had strong support from the rural population in Lasta, and Raya Qobo *awrajas*. According to some informants, Gugsä may have been a *woreda* governor in Wag before the Revolution, but I was not able to confirm it. Some of the records state that Gugsä's forces numbered over 50,000 in September 1976 when he sacked Sekota, the capital of Wag, others put the number at 30,000 or slightly less. In October, Gugsä's forces attempted to capture Korem and cut off the Dessie-Asmara road but were turned back by the *Nebelbal* force stationed there after heavy fighting in which there were many casualties on both sides. In January 1977, Gugsä again launched an attack on Korem but again his plans were frustrated by *Nebelbal*, which then forced him to withdraw to the remote and rugged hills near the Tekazzie River. By mid-1977,

police reports from both Wag and Raya Qobo state that Gugsä and Teffera, who still were in control of much of the countryside in Wag, were co-opted by the EDU and were receiving arms and other assistance channelled from the Sudan. Though weakened and less aggressive than previously, Gugsä's forces continued to be active through 1977. The records are however silent about the eventual fate of both leaders.

There is no evidence in the archives of co-ordination among the ten or twelve rebel groups operating in various parts of Wollo in the period under discussion. Some of the police reports assert that the main rebel groups were in close touch with one another and did co-ordinate their activities, but they provide no evidence. Major Tessema's letter noted above speaks of captured rebel documents showing close rebel co-operation but no such documents have been found. In his sworn statement to the police, Judge Teshome reported that *Fit* Ali Farris' men spoke about plans to attack and capture Dessie simultaneously from three sides: *Dej* Berhane Meskel's forces were to sweep into the capital from the north, along the main highway; *Kegn* Assefa's forces were to force their way from the west, through Kuta Ber; and *Fit* Ali's were to enter from the south. But I believe this was merely talk and no serious planning was carried out by the forces in question. It is my opinion that while some of the leaders were aware of rebel activities under way in other parts of Wollo, and some of them left one group and joined another, there was very limited co-ordination of operations or support of one another's efforts.

On the other hand, the government's co-ordinated campaign to crush the "counter-revolutionary forces", which was launched in May 1976, was a dismal failure. The authorities did not have sufficient security forces to undertake a co-ordinated offensive. Indeed, their commando and air-borne forces were shunted from one point to another in response to rebel initiatives, and by 1977, the *Fetno Derash*, which then was the only mobile force in the province, was highly demoralized on account of this. The peasant militia turned out to be far less effective than it was expected, and Wollo officials were very disappointed with it. The militia was unwieldy and not easy to

mobilize in an emergency. The peasants in the militia thought of themselves as peasants first and militia second. When called for duty, they were unable to respond quickly and on time. They were reluctant to stay on duty for long (except in the off-season) because of the pressure of work and family responsibilities at home. Since they did not have proper military training they were not easy to deploy during engagements. Moreover, they were poorly armed and often short of ammunition. In his letter referred to above, Major Tessema reports that the armed peasants who were deployed against the rebels during the battle of Kuta Ber were issued five bullets each; this was woefully inadequate.

Relative to the regular government forces, the rebels were also poorly armed (they carried old and clumsy weapons), but the initiative was often on their side, and at first they fought better than the peasant militia. However, in many of the engagements with the regular forces, the rebels sustained heavy losses, and in the end this was their undoing. In addition, as the conflict dragged on, the gentry rebels found it more and more difficult to sustain their movement. The support they had earlier enjoyed was gradually dissipated for the reasons discussed below. As was noted earlier, the rebels sought easier targets and quick sources of gain from the end of 1975, and sacking small outlying towns was one of them. Many such towns in western Wollo, such as Aquesta and Masha in Wore Himeno, Kelela in Borena, Legehida in Wore Illu, and Degaga in Albuko *woreda* in Qallu, were over-run and sacked several times in the course of 1976 and 1977. The town of Mekane Selaam, capital of Borena, was attacked numerous times but it never fell to the rebels. In one such attack, in June 1977, Munege Birru, the veteran rebel, lost his life.

But the rebels turned their fury particularly against peasants and their organizations, and their chief weapon was arson and confiscation of cattle and other property. Their targets were leaders of peasant organizations (PA leaders and members of judicial tribunals), armed peasant guards, and peasants who supported their organizations or participated in the land reform process. The homes of such persons, their crops and grain

stores were destroyed by fire, their cattle were looted, and they themselves attacked and murdered. From the second half of 1976, thousands of homes were put to the torch, and innumerable households lost their cattle and other property. Indeed, many rural areas in western Wollo, particularly in Borena, Wore Himeno and parts of Wore Illu were on fire at this time. However, as the peasants began to pay a heavy price for the land reform and their organizations, they became more determined to resist the rebels, and subsequently many peasant *kebelles* took greater initiatives to defend themselves against rebel attacks.

As the rebels' strength declined and they were actively pursued by local security forces, in which peasants now played a more prominent role, they turned more and more towards simple acts of arson, murder and pillage. By early 1977, many of the smaller rebel groups had already been crushed. At the end of May 1977, *Fir Mekonnen Melaku* and nine of his close associates were captured following a clash with security forces in western Wore Himeno, and were later executed by the Derg. *Kegn Mekonnen Assen*, the main rebel leader in Wore Illu, was killed in action in December 1977. *Fir Ali Farris* was captured by security forces in Gonder province in January 1978, and later died in prison under mysterious circumstances. Though the records do not clearly suggest it, it does appear that *Sindew Sheikh Yahya* returned to banditry towards the end of 1977. Active in Wore Illu, Borena, and the border area between Wollo and Shoa that was his old haunt, he was finally killed in a skirmish with security forces in early October 1980. In the north, *Gugsa Ambaw's* opposition simply faded away at the end of 1977. Of the 113 rebels I was able to identify from the archival sources, more than half lost their lives in clashes with the security forces or were killed by the authorities under captivity. The records are silent about the rest, and we do not know what their fate turned out to be.

Thus ended the gentry insurrection in Wollo which for some two and half years had fought the Derg and its radical program of agrarian change, and which in the process had brought turmoil and destruction to many parts of the province.

The revolt against the land reform here was the most fierce of all such uprisings in the country, and it was costly to the Derg, to local officialdom, and above all to the peasantry.

Conclusion

Traditional agrarian movements, like the ones we have examined in this work, have a dynamic of their own. While their objectives as a rule are confined within narrow horizons, they have a tendency to involve everyone in the rural world. Emotive, violent and at times irrational in their manifestations, they rarely permit individuals or groups to remain neutral or unconcerned. Those who organize and direct the uprisings may belong to one class or social stratum, but the agitations will invariably affect everyone in rural communities. Thus the peasantry is drawn in either as a matter of conscious decision or because of the force of circumstances. All rebel movements attempt to involve the peasantry either as a direct participant or as a non-participant supporter, but the methods they use to this end differ widely; in our case, most of the rebel groups used fear and intimidation to gain peasant support which in the end proved to be counter-productive.

What conclusions can be drawn from the experiences of agrarian unrest in Wollo in the two periods discussed in this work? The following, I believe, are some of the main ones. The protest movements that we have examined were not ideologically driven; they attempted to appeal to rural populations, in a crude and authoritarian way, by emphasizing the sanctity of customary rights and obligations. The movements were local based and local oriented, and none of them spoke on behalf of the nation or of some historic region. The rebels' aims were to restore existing social structures and property rights, which they believed were threatened by new policies and socio-economic reforms. Why have the gentry played such a prominent role in rural uprisings in this country? I believe the following provides part of the answer. 1) The gentry own property, often in the form of rental land, which provides a means of subsistence even when the men in question are engaged in rebel activ-

ity. No such support is available to the humble peasant. 2) The gentry frequently possess or have easy access to weapons; this is important in a rural culture where protest often means violent confrontation. In contrast, few peasants own arms. 3) There is a long tradition of gentry banditry in the country, particularly in Wollo and the northern provinces. In the event of defeat, it was customary for gentry rebels to ask clemency from the authorities which they often received; this enabled them to return to their former lives with, on many occasions, little loss of property or status. Such opportunities were denied to the rebel peasant who most probably lost his head in the event of defeat or capture. It should also be remembered that the peasant is always weighed down with heavy burdens and responsibilities. The demands of the agricultural cycle as well as those of the landlord and the state allowed hardly any respite. In contrast, the gentry, who were not directly involved in agricultural production, led a relatively unencumbered life. We are here dealing with rural protest defined as a form of collective political action in which existing authority is forcefully challenged, either by peaceful means (strikes, demonstrations) or through violent agitations (armed revolts, insurrections, etc.). Such a definition goes beyond "everyday forms of struggle", which, though important to the subordinate classes in rural society, should be seen as a form of proto-protest or protest at a primitive stage, and should not be viewed on equal terms with the kind of opposition activity discussed in this study²⁷. It is my opinion -though I shall be happy to be proved wrong- that protest movements of the kind we have examined in these pages will, in future, be a thing of the past in this country. With the greater politicization of the population, first promoted by the Derg and now by the present government, rural agitations will increasingly be driven by ideological and ethnic factors. The violent opposition to the land reform in Wollo will probably be the last outbreak of traditional protest.

27 Isaacman argues that peasants are able to initiate and direct autonomous protest movements (p. 48ff). The chief proponent of the "everyday struggle" approach, as it relates to Third World peasantry, is Scott. See also Feierman.

In both periods reviewed here, the rural insurrections had considerable impact on the existing regimes -a fact that has not been sufficiently appreciated. Though not immediately obvious, the agitations showed up the deficiencies of the regimes, their Achilles heel as it were, and contributed to the decline of their power and authority. In the imperial period, the state bureaucracy was seriously discredited by both the Gojjam and Wollo anti-tax uprisings. Similarly, the Derg was weakened by the long-drawn out and violent opposition in Wollo in the years between 1975 and 1977. Moreover, in the latter case, the collapse of state power in the rural areas brought on by the agitations encouraged other rebel movements -the organized Fronts- to establish their presence in northern Wollo.

The peasantry made shrewd choices in each of the periods of unrest. In the earlier agitations, the benefits sought by the protesters were relatively limited, and yet the peasantry chose to be identified with the opposition when it felt it had very little to lose by doing so. In the Derg period, the stakes were comparatively high, though at the outset of the Revolution, many peasants in Wollo were sceptical whether anything good would come out of the radical political changes underway in the country. Nevertheless, the Wollo peasantry *paid a heavy price* for the land reform: hundreds of peasants were killed, thousands of rural homes were set on fire, and large numbers of livestock were looted and slaughtered by gentry rebels. It is worth noting here that the struggle between the landed classes, especially the gentry and the peasantry and rural activators -a struggle which was sometimes fierce as in Wollo, and which involved considerable sacrifices on the part of the peasantry- has not been sufficiently appreciated. In the end, the active involvement of the peasantry contributed greatly to the defeat of the counter-Revolution in Wollo, making the peasants' sacrifices worthwhile, at least until the Derg itself betrayed their trust and dashed their hopes by its unpopular program of agrarian socialism.

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- Annual reports from the Wollo Administration (Dessie) to the Mol.
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Annex 3.1

Wollo Provincial and Awraja Authorities
Imperial and Derg Period
Governors (1973) and Administrators (1976)

Awrajas	Governors	Administrators
Ambassel	Ato Tesfaye Adem	Maj. Andarge Meshesha
Aussa	Maj. Tefera W/ Tensai	Maj. Wondirad Beyene
Borena	Fit. Mesfin Asfaw	Maj. Assefa Berhe
Dessie Zuria	Fit. Farris H/ Mariam	Maj. Tessema Waqjira
Lasta	Fit. Tefera Estifanos	L/Col. Abebe Gelagle
Qallu	Fit. Engida Indaylalu	Maj. Negash T/ Mariam
Raya Qobo	Fit. Ambaw Tefferi	Maj. Tamrat Biqilla
Wadla Delanta	Fit. Belay Zelelew	Maj. Demisse Worqe
Wore Himenu	Fit. Ali Amede	Maj. Aklilu Mulugeta
Wore Illu	Fit. Ambaw Tefferi	Maj. Haile Berewaq
Wag	Wagshum Getahun Admasu	-----
Yejju	Fit. Moges Ali	L/Com. Yoseph H/ Sellasie

Wollo Governorate *Enderassie* (1973): Dej Solomom Abraham.

Wollo Deputy *Enderassie* (1973): Dej Kebede Ali Wollae.

Wollo Province Chief Administrator (1976): Col Getahun Ejjigu

Wollo Deputy Chief Administrator (1976): Ato Walelign Hailu;
later, Ato Tesfaye Adem.

Previous *Awraja* Governors:

Fit Belay Zelelew: Raya Qobo, later Yejju.

Graz Tesfaye Gebeyaw: Yejju.

Dej Behane Mesqel Desta: Lasta; Yejju.

Fit Ali Farris: Wore Himeno

Fit Mekonnen Melaku: Wore Himeno.

Source: MoI Archives.

Annex 3. 2

The following are rebels and rebel leaders who appear most frequently in the records, especially the police and security reports. The officials in Wollo felt more threatened by the involvement of titled persons in rebel activity, and this bias was reflected in their reports.

Main Rebel Leaders Identified in MoI Archives

Titled Persons

Fit Ali Farris
Kegn Assefa Tareqegn
Kegn Mekonnnen Assen
Kegn Mekonnen Melaku
Dej Berhane Mesqel Desta
Graz Hailu Barento
?Graz Muneye Birr (?Borru)
Fit Belay Zelelew
Kegn Wodajo Ali
Bal Demissie Barento
Bal Antench Ayele
?Graz Demissie Merawi
Kegn Fisseha Engida
Graz Mekuria Zegeye
Graz Teffera Lulseged
Bal Tadesse Yimam
Graz Mekonnen Kassaw
Graz Asfaw Yimer
Kegn Abate Laqew
Bal Tebeje Worqu
Bal Beshir Ali
Graz Yirga Yigezu
Kegn Admassu Zegeye
Graz Negussie Gugsu
Graz Haile Girogis Birru

Nech Lebash Officers

L.Col Tadesse Seralign
Cap Tesfay Mezmur
Maj Abate Yimam
Lt Melaku Tessema
Lt Wossen Yimer
Cap Getachew Ali
Cap Assefa Yimer
Cap Ayalew Zewdu

Others

Sindew Sheikh Yahya
Gugsa Ambaw
Teferra Mengistu
Arega Kebede
Allelign Tessema
Ketema Gizaw
Zewde Demissie
Demissie Darge
Ayalew Mebratu
Bekele Gugsa
Admassu Belay
Demissie Beshaw
Endris Ahmed
Getachew Yimer
Tassew Dessalegn
Teffera Nigatu
Yimam Kebede
Sayid Abegaz
Astatqe Tessema
Yimer Barento
Assefa Ejjigu
Awrraris Demissie
Ketsela Bekele
Demeqe Merid
Asnake Yimer

Merid Wolde
Tassew Gessesse
Alemayehu Molla
Belay Aligaz
Abate Muheye

LAND REGISTRATION AND TENURE SECURITY

A Critical Assessment

Introduction²⁸

The Ethiopian government has been undertaking a program of rural land registration since 2003, and by 2006 more than half the country's farm households had received what are commonly referred to as land certificates. Initially, land certification was expected to be completed by the year 2010 but the implementation of the program was greatly accelerated following the elections of 2005 and it now appears that the completion date will be much earlier. The goal is to issue every rightful holder of farm land a certificate of use rights and to have his/her plots recorded in a registry kept at the local *kebele* office. The main objective of the program is to address the problem of tenure insecurity and to establish an effective framework for land administration at the local level. Land registration is expected to reduce land disputes and litigation, to bring about the empowerment of women, and to lead to increased investments on the land (see Solomon Abebe 2006). The documents issued vary in form from one *killil* to another: in Tigrai, land holders are given a piece of paper which resembles a certificate, while in Amhara, the documents issued look like a bank book and are referred to as "user books". It is arguable whether the program in progress can be called title registration but for the purposes

28 This is a slightly revised version of a paper which first appeared as Occasional Paper No. 2, Van Vollenhoven Institute for Law, Governance and Development, Leiden University, Leiden, May 2007.

of this study I shall assume that what is being undertaken in rural Ethiopia is a form of title registration.

This study explores the relationship between land rights and title registration and the extent to which the latter has contributed to peasants' security of rights to land. It is based on the findings of field investigation in two locations in the north and south of the country undertaken in 2006 and early 2007. The analysis presented will rely mainly on the information gathered in Dessie Zuria *woreda*, South Wollo Zone, Amhara *killil*, northern Ethiopia, but for contrast I shall make use of the results of my field work in several *woredas* in Wollaita Zone, southern Ethiopia. The two locations are very different in most respects, including in terms of agrarian history, farming systems and cultural practices, but the most important difference which has a bearing on the subject under study but which has not been given sufficient attention in the relevant literature has to do with demographic pressure. Wollaita is perhaps the most vulnerable area in southern Ethiopia due in large part to high demographic pressure and acute land shortage. The demographic stress in the area has been increasing in severity for well over half a century and is responsible to a great extent for high levels of rural destitution, and frequent food and health crises. In the rural communities where we did our interviews, the population density reaches over 500 persons per km², and a household which has 0.25 *ha.* of land here is considered fortunate. In contrast, Dessie Zuria, while very populous by the standards of Amhara *killil*, has a population density of about one-third that of Wollaita, and average land holdings measure over 0.70 *ha.*

The extent and variety of the instruments I used to gather information in the two locations were different. In Dessie Zuria, the instruments consisted of the following: a field survey undertaken on a selected sample of certificate holders in two *kebelles*; interviews with key peasant informants and about a dozen local public officials; case histories gathered from a number of household heads, and information relevant to land certification collected from public records (including police and court records) and the *woreda* data bases. In contrast, the

field work in Wollaita was less extensive: I did not conduct a field survey here, but did hold the same kind of interviews but with a smaller number of peasants and local officials. I was unable to gather information from public records about the certification program but did collect socio-economic data useful for the study.

The different approach in our field work is partly due to differences in the scope of implementation of the certification program in the north and south of the country. In the two kebelles in Dessie Zuria woreda, land certification is almost complete, having been launched in 2003 and implemented with a good deal of care and resource expenditure. More than 90 percent of land holders have received certificates. The woreda as a whole has been designated by the authorities as one of two pilot woredas in the killil selected for special attention through the support of Sida, the Swedish donor organization, as well as to serve as a model for other woredas. In Wollaita in contrast, the certification program got under way very recently and less than half the rural households had received their documents in 2006 when I did the field work. In Wollaita and the Southern killil in general, the program has been dogged with difficulties, delays and shortage of resources.

Land certification has aroused a great deal of enthusiasm and raised considerable expectations among the population in the rural areas, although it varies in degree from one part of the country to another. Compared to the situation in the recent past, i.e., before the certification program was launched, there has been considerable improvement in peasant attitudes with respect to tenure security and land transactions. Most peasants say they now have a greater sense of security in their holdings than in the past. A majority of the respondents in our sample survey in the north of the country said they were more confident of renting out their land to others. A surface reading of the evidence suggests that there are relatively less land disputes at present and certification is given as the main reason for this apparent decrease. In all, land certification is seen by a majority of peasants as a welcome measure, although neither the beneficiaries nor public officials at the local level had any say in its

inception, planning and method of implementation.

The initiative has also raised considerable interest among the country's major donors as well as academic circles. Donor groups such as USAID and the World Bank, in particular, are favorably impressed and are quite keen to provide support to the program in one form or another. A new survey report prepared by a World Bank team makes a highly positive assessment of the registration program. It argues that large-scale land certification has been undertaken rapidly and successfully, with low cost, in a participatory manner, and with positive results. It suggests that "elements of Ethiopia's certification process, with modification as needed, could serve as a model for other African countries" (Deininger et al 2007). There is less criticism of the government on its land policy coming out of donor circles now than previously, and the government itself is quite satisfied that it has finally addressed the problem of tenure insecurity for the rural population.

And yet, a careful and more nuanced reading of the evidence from the field clearly indicates that the issue is much more complex than it appears at first glance or is made out to be. As we shall show in the pages that follow, land certification is certainly a step in the right direction, nevertheless, the kind of robust tenure security that would allow individuals greater freedom of choice and action with respect to their property and livelihoods still eludes the country's hard pressed peasants. Security of rights to land in the proper sense of the term is an important basis for peasant empowerment, but there was no evidence to suggest that peasants in our study had gained any sense of empowerment and autonomy or that their subordinate attitudes towards the state and state officials had changed in any way since. Indeed, it was evident from our field experience that some of the institutional changes at the grassroots level that have accompanied land certification have enhanced the authority of the state over the farm household.

This work was originally conceived as an attempt to engage with the work of Hernando de Soto and especially his arguments regarding property rights and their formalization. A few words on the subject is therefore unavoidable.

Formalization of Property Rights: A Brief Review

There is a good deal of recent work on law, property rights and economic development, and both academics and donor groups have drawn attention to the importance of these subjects and their relationship to tenure security and poverty reduction²⁹. The basic argument is that economic pursuits and relationships require an effective and inclusive legal system with clearly defined rules securing rights to property, determining the obligations of state and individuals, and governing commercial and contractual relations. Such a legal system promotes efficiency, increased investment and entrepreneurial drive.

The work of Hernando de Soto in particular places greater emphasis on the poor on the one hand, and formalization of property law as an instrument of poverty reduction, on the other. De Soto holds that property rights codified in law and the recognition of such rights made manifest in the form of title and registration provide full security for disadvantaged populations in both rural and urban settings, and are essential conditions for poverty reduction and broad-based economic development. His work has stimulated considerable debate and interest among academics, the donor community as well as international organizations. His ideas have been enthusiastically received among some donor circles but have aroused strong criticism from within the property rights school as well as practitioners and scholars engaged in the development field. De Soto contends that to be poor does not mean to be assetless, on the contrary, he shows that the poor hold immense assets and wealth in the form of land, houses, buildings and small businesses which if properly recognized would enable them to pull themselves out of poverty. The problem is that these assets are not valued because they are not properly documented and provided legal protection. Giving formal property rights to the poor transforms these assets into living capital, enabling

29 Toulmin and Quan 2000, World Bank 2003, Hernando de Soto 2000, Mwangi 2006.

the poor to have access to credit and allowing them to invest in their business and improve their earnings. De Soto is convinced that once their immense wealth is "unlocked" through an inclusive property law and adequate formalization, such as title registration, the entrepreneurial drive of the poor will energize the formal economy leading to high rates of growth and development.

De Soto's work has been criticized for many shortcomings and from a variety of perspectives, but due and I shall briefly look at some of the ones which are relevant to this study³⁰. In the first instance, his conception of property law is said to be narrowly constructed: he recognizes only formal written law and individual/private property and leaves out other legal forms and property systems. In the African context, especially, land rights are subject to multiple legal systems since both customary and private/individual tenure is accepted in many countries in the continent. There are those who argue that legal pluralism is not well suited to formalization measures such as title and registration, while others suggest that customary tenure does not require formalization to ensure protection of rights and security of holdings. De Soto and his supporters would argue that customary legal and property institutions and the social and cultural network in which they are embedded make formalization a futile exercise and hence there is a strong need for institutional reform. Secondly, the argument that formalization of property rights opens up opportunities for access to institutional credit is not supported by the empirical evidence. In fact, in Ethiopia as well as many African countries the poor as well as non-poor rely to a large extent on customary saving and credit institutions rather than the formal financial sector because the former are easy to access, do not require collateral, and provide quick and efficient service. The issue of collateral is frequently not the main reason that the formal sector is shunned even by those who can provide collateral. Thirdly, formalization of land rights has been highly

30 See Nyamu-Musembi 2006 for the range of de Soto criticisms. For the legal pluralism argument in the African context, see articles and references in Esther Mwangi 2006.

unsuccessful in Kenya and other African countries where titling and registration programs have been undertaken since the 1950s and 1960s. As Sara Berry (1993) and others have shown, the enduring strength of customary tenure, and the practice of ensuring claims to land through systems of social, political and kin networks and negotiations have meant that formal records and title play an insignificant role either in access to land or dispute settlement.

To these arguments I will add the following three points which I believe are significant in the light of the Ethiopian experience, and which the critical literature has either ignored or given much less attention than they deserve. To begin with, by over-emphasizing the determinant role of property law and its legalization de Soto adopts a state-centric view of property rights and its guarantee for the poor. But, as we shall later, formalization of the law by itself provides no robust guarantee, and where such guarantee has been achieved it has been the result of struggles by the poor themselves and non-state agents. Moreover, formal property law, he argues, and the conversion process in the law allows the poor to convert their assets into capital. Under capitalism, he states, the legal infrastructure is hidden in the property system, and the formal property system converts assets into value (pp. 45-46). But de Soto fails to recognize that the formal property system of capitalist societies is a product of a long historical process and the outcome of competing (often warring) economic interests, social classes, political parties or sectional groupings³¹. Hidden in the formal property law of a capitalist country is a small slice of its social history. Where this kind of pluralist struggle is absent or weakly manifested, as is the case in many developing countries, property law comes to reflect the interests of one dominate group, or, as in Ethiopia, that of the state and its mandarins. Here property law is not inclusive but restrictive, prohibiting disadvantaged populations the freedom and opportunity to get the full value of their assets. It is enough to cite apartheid

31 See the classic study of Barrington Moore for the historical perspective; Aston and Philpin for the debate.

South Africa as an extreme example of legal exclusion, and the "feudal" imperial state of Ethiopia as a case of restrictiveness. As we shall see in the discussion below, title registration in such circumstances at best only legitimizes the restrictive rights in question and does not expand their scope.

Secondly, de Soto reflects a narrow conception of property rights in two particular respects. First, he anchors such rights in property law, and thus covers them in legalist costume; and second, he does not make allowances for rights protection outside the statutory framework. The legalist approach is inadequate because property rights will be of limited value if they exist in isolation, but rather must be part of a political legal system incorporating rights to justice, human rights and good governance. Property rights should thus be understood in the broader, political legal sense, since only then can we measure the real significance of formalization and registration. On the other hand, as the contemporary and historical experience shows, where the poor are concerned, property as well as other rights have to be continually defended otherwise there is the danger that they will be eroded or nullified by powerful forces as well as the state itself seeking to maximize their interests. Rights protection outside the formal legal system, through poor people's own organizations, or through political and rights advocacy groups has made it possible for the poor to benefit from existing formalization programs as has been shown by a number of recent works on Asian and African countries³².

Thirdly, de Soto has very little to say about rights awareness and the significance of this to the poor. In fact, the literature on property rights in general has not given sufficient attention to this subject except brief references here and there to the "accessibility" of the law, by which is meant whether the law is written in comprehensible language and whether it is in the public domain. By rights awareness I mean knowledge and

32 See Franco 2005 for the Philippines; the experience of Land Alliances in supporting the rural poor in some African countries appears in Mwangi 2006; on legal advocacy groups in Africa and Asia, see Golub 2003, Manning 1999.

voice: knowledge of rights through some form of rights education or advocacy, and the ability of the poor to voice their demands in defense of their rights. Since the state is frequently not a disinterested party, the transmission of such awareness is best accomplished either directly by individuals having access to the sources in question, through poor people's organizations or rights advocacy groups. I hold that rights awareness is an important element of the empowerment of the poor and a reference to customary institutions illustrates this point. Where customary institutions function effectively, they do so because individuals have clear and direct knowledge of the rules and responsibilities, that they are able to voice their views where disputes arise and that there is direct access to dispute settlement mechanisms. There have been many examples where tenure reform implementation and land rights formalization measures have failed because public agents and others paid scant attention to the importance of legal awareness (Palmer 2000).

The Political Legal Context of Land Registration

The Political Setting

The year 2005, when the Federal government issued an important land law in which land certification featured prominently, was also the year when the country held its most hotly contested parliamentary elections. The 2005 elections were different from previous ones because for the first time in the country's electoral history a large number of opposition candidates, some running as independents and others under the umbrella of loosely formed coalitions and united fronts, were allowed to participate in the elections. Significantly also, the state-controlled media was opened up allowing access to the Opposition along with the party in power. The Opposition was able to contest nearly 80 percent of the 523 seats in Parliament, competing vigorously not just in the urban centers but also in the rural areas as well. For the first time ever, peasants all over the country with access to the radio were able to listen to live debates between the government and the Opposition and to campaign

speeches by candidates highly critical of government policies and programs. There was thus a massive grassroots interest and high expectations in the rural areas in particular that was not apparent in any of the preceding elections. Figures provided by the country's National Electoral Board (NEB), a government body, shows that nearly 80 percent of the population eligible to vote registered, of which 90 percent turned out to cast their ballots on Election Day. Measured by voter registration and the turnout on ballot day, Election 2005 was a resounding success. The final results of the elections have been fiercely contested by the Opposition as well as some international observer groups, both of which claim that the government lost the elections by a good margin, while figures released by the NEB some three months after the ballots were cast gave the victory to the government. Even if we go by the official results, it is quite clear that the Opposition has done immensely better in this election than at any time in the past. In 2000, it was able to win only 12 percent of the seats in the House of Representatives of the Federal Parliament, whereas the official count declared by NEB shows that it won 40 percent of the seats in this election, with the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), the strongest contending party winning 20 percent. Opposition successes in the *Killil* elections were equally impressive³³. Significantly enough, this success was a result of massive support by urban but more importantly rural voters.

There are a number of issues and events connected with the elections that are significant for our purposes and I would like to go over them briefly here. First is the fact that the land issue, while not considered a burning issue in the campaign was taken up for debate by a number of candidates and some of the bigger political parties. The government came in for some strong criticism on its land policy and some of the front runner candidates let it be known that they would propose to change

33 For comparison with earlier elections see Dessalegn and Meheret 2004; for the 2005 elections see Dessalegn and Meheret 2006. For figures from NEB visit www.electionsethiopia.org I should note that the ruling party is made up of a coalition of ethnic parties in power in each of the *killils*.

the policy in favor of a more secure form of ownership if they were elected to Parliament. This was cause for great concern for the government for whom the existing system of state ownership was almost sacrosanct and one of the main pillars of its political and economic strategy for the country. The government's strong commitment to state ownership had ideological roots but it was also an instrument which enabled it to have greater leverage over land allocations and greater hegemonic intervention in rural society.

The second issue had to do with the government's expectation of the outcome of the elections. State officials were confident that the ruling party would win the elections handsomely but conceded that Parliament after the elections would be different from the outgoing one and that a good number of the seats in it would be taken by the Opposition. Their assessment was that in large measure they would lose the urban vote while the rural vote would be massively behind them. As ballot day approached, however, and the turn of the electorate towards the Opposition became apparent, the confidence of the authorities came under severe strain, nevertheless they still remained convinced that victory was in their hands even though the massive majority they had expected would not materialize. This led to a spate of decisions by the government, and a series of legislations were rushed through Parliament in its dying days, which was to be a cause of bitterness and recrimination between the governing party and the Opposition. We will look at two of these decisions since they have a bearing on our discussion.

The first was the passing of two important land laws in July 2005, nearly two months after the elections were held. Such was the agitation of the public following the elections and what many thought was the undue delay in the announcement of the results that not many voices were raised to question the propriety of the old Parliament continuing to sit and pass laws weeks after the people had voted in new legislators. The most important act was the rural land administration law but another law on land expropriation and the payment of compensation, which has not received much attention in the

debate here, also came out in the same month. The other decision worth noting was the passing of legislation to change the Parliamentary rules of procedure which was rushed through the House about a month later. Among the rule changes that were approved was one which made it impossible for any party in Parliament except the one with a majority seat to initiate legislation, replacing the old rule in which it was sufficient for twenty M.Ps to propose legislation for it to be considered by the House. The aim of the government was to effectively paralyze the Opposition in Parliament and remove any risk that some of its cherished policies, including those on land, would be reversed in the post-election period.

The post-election period was marked by high political and social tension and there were a good number of protests and strikes in the urban areas. These protests were forcibly put down by the security forces, culminating in the death of scores of protesters, and the arrest and detention of thousands of people. Most of the leadership of CUD, a large number of its campaigners as well as journalists and civil society activists were arrested and charged with attempting to overthrow the Constitution by violent means and genocide³⁴. In the rural areas, the situation was different, and here the government adopted what may be described as a carrot and stick approach. On the one hand, local authorities conducted considerable harassment of peasants suspected of voting for the Opposition in many localities, and in a few occasions, peasants who resisted harassment were reported to have lost their land allocations. On the other hand, land certification programs were accelerated, covering a large number of households in a short time. Respondents in the two localities in the north and south of the country where we did the field work informed us that many in their communities had voted for the Opposition but while they themselves did not suffer any serious consequences as a

34 Several western governments and a number of international human rights groups condemned the government for the use of excessive force in suppressing the protests. An inquiry committee set up by the government to investigate the events concluded that 196 people were shot and killed by the security forces.

result, they had heard of such harassment in other localities.

The aim of speeding up land certification was to win back the support of the rural population and to undermine the chances for the Opposition. This was important for the governing party because elections for kebele and woreda assemblies, which were planned for 2006 but postponed, would be taking place soon. These local elections are critical for the governing party because losing them would erode its power base in the countryside, and, given that the urban areas are a hotbed of opposition, this would mean running the risk of losing the general elections scheduled for 2010. The ruling party is now busy in the rural areas, holding numerous meetings for political and organizational purposes involving both active and non-active peasants. It is quite evident that the party is conscious of the latent power of the peasantry, and that it needs to gain its support if it is to stay in power. This is where the land question assumes immense significance.

Institutional Setting

The most important institutional change in the last half decade is the woreda (or district) level decentralization that was initiated in 2001 and is now almost complete. Decentralization here is aimed at bringing development program management closer to the community and to make service delivery more efficient and effective. Under this new system, woredas will receive block grant transfers from the government which they are expected to manage themselves. They also have the power to prepare their own budgets and annual plans, to generate income from their own resources and use the income for their own purposes, and recruit and hire staff (see Tegegne and Kassahun 2006). In effect, the *woreda* has now become the focal point of local-level planning and program implementation. Below the *woreda* is the kebele which is responsible for needs assessment and service delivery and law and order; it is expected to establish close and direct links with the rural household. Both structures are governed by elected councils and thus are expected to be democratic institutions. Local level

democracy, which is the other objective of decentralization, obviously opens up immense opportunities for all community-directed programs. Such an institutional set up is supposed to enable peasant communities and individual households to express their preferences, needs, and demands. In turn, program planning and implementation will benefit by greater bottom-up participation, and better opportunities for monitoring and evaluation.

On the other hand, there are at present considerable hurdles that need to be overcome. The decentralization program has been largely completed, including the shifting of staff from both the Killil and Zones to the *woredas*. However, the institutional capacity of a great majority of the *woredas* at present is a cause for great concern. Many *woredas* lack basic infrastructure, capable and trained staff, proper equipment and resources. The duties and responsibilities that they have been shouldered with compares poorly with the capacity of the staff and institutional set up that they are able to call upon. As a result, decentralized planning and programming has been severely constrained and the opportunities for local level democracy have been limited. Weak institutional, resource and staff capacity has been aggravated by high rates of staff turnover and institutional instability. Public employees who have higher qualifications are especially less likely to stay in the *woreda*. Staff turnover has impacted badly on program planning and implementation, raising issues of sustainability and program quality. Changes and reforms in government bodies have been quite numerous, and this has contributed to institutional weakness.

There are important institutional changes at the kebele and lower levels, and as we observed in Dessie Zuria *woreda*, this has come about partly as a consequence of land certification. The kebele is divided into three sub-kebelles and ten *gotts* (which are large precincts); below these are "communes" which are development units of 35 to 50 households. These lower units have direct links with the executive leadership of the kebele, thus there are now lines of communication as well as of control extending to the household level. The elected kebele council, which is the decision-making power in the ke-

belle, elects several standing committees, of which the Executive, Land Administration and Crime Prevention committees are the most important. There are ad-hoc "task forces" formed from time to time, such as the Food Security, and Environment task forces but these are temporary bodies and are disbanded when they complete their tasks. In each particular case, it is the Executive which selects the committee members (as well as magistrates to the local social courts) and presents them to the Council for approval. In both the kebelles we studied, the Executive leadership consisted of members of the ruling party, and party membership is a factor though not an over-riding one for election to committee posts. All officials elected were male but we found one woman who was a member of the 14-strong Executive Committee in one of our study kebelles.

A word here on the status of the social courts is in order. Social courts were established by law in all Killils, and their competence extends only to minor cases with a pecuniary value not exceeding 1000 Birr (see ANRS 1997). These are in effect "community" courts and in a sense a replacement of the Judicial Tribunals of the Derg. The magistrates of the courts are selected from the kebele and have no legal training, and their formal education does not extend beyond the rudimentary level. The magistrates my team interviewed in Dessie Zuria woreda were all members of the ruling party. While the choice of magistrates from within the community is a positive measure, there is cause for concern with regard to the independence of the courts and impartiality of the magistrates. The social court has not been established as an independent body and this may in the long term compromise its credibility. The change of magistrates every five years that is required by the law is ill-advised since this will mean losing valuable experience and knowledge gained through the training given to the magistrates. While most peasants interviewed in Dessie Zuria as well as Wollaita were quite satisfied with the work of the social courts, the courts are reported to be corrupt and unpopular in some parts of the country (MCB 2007).

An important issue that needs to be raised here is the dominant role of the ruling party in local affairs. The struc-

ture of rural governance is in fact much more complicated than meets the eye. While there has been administrative decentralization, providing the woreda and to some extent the kebele more responsibility and authority than in the past, in terms of "party politics" however, there is a strong system of centralization and upward accountability. The ruling party operates on the principle of what in the old Soviet communist system used to be called "democratic centralism". At the local level, party and government are closely linked with little or no separation between the two. As was noted above, the leadership of the kebelles, including active members in committees are members of the party; this is also more or less true in the woreda. The members of the elected Councils in both cases are either party members or have been supported by the party. Thus there is very little opportunity for alternative voices to be heard. Local officials depend on instructions from above and there is a hierarchical cadre system, and as a result, the party has immense influence in decision making and program management.

The practice in many local communities during the certification process was to elect from among the participating households an ad hoc committee called land administration committee (or LAC) which is entrusted with the task of recording the boundaries of individual holdings, measuring them, and registering the owners and their household members. The Committee was a temporary body and was to disband once the certification process was over. This has changed and LAC has become a standing committee elected by the Council whose responsibilities now include serving as a first instance body for hearing and resolving land disputes. The Committee consists of seventeen members but at each weekly sitting four members of the Executive Committee attend the deliberations. LAC members were a mix of peasant party activists and local elders who are known to have a good reputation in the community. There is thus an attempt to combine modern and customary dispute resolution practices. We shall return to this further down.

The Legal Framework

Here we are concerned more with the process of legalization of the Federal laws noted above than their contents since we have discussed the laws in an earlier work (Dessalegn 2006b). As was noted above, the Federal legislation was submitted to Parliament and approved under contentious political circumstances. The land administration law, which was prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, was submitted to Parliament at the end of March 2005. The Ministry says that the draft was sent for comments to senior government officials both at the Federal and Killil level but there was no attempt to invite public debate on it nor to solicit the opinions of particular stakeholders, such as NGOs and civil society organizations, the academic and research community, or rural development experts. The draft was not accessible to the public. The government controlled media noted only the submission of the draft law to Parliament but was careful not to seem to encourage public discussion of it. *There was at the time widespread understanding among government bodies, the donor community in the country, and informed opinion that the land issue was almost a taboo issue and senior government officials were known to have discouraged any public debate on the subject (see Dessalegn 2004).* The draft law was sent to the Rural Development Standing Committee of the House in April, with the Committee returning the draft to the full House in June with suggestions for some minor revisions which were mainly of an editorial and non-substantive nature. At the time of the final debate in the House, a dozen or so representatives from civil society organizations and officials from concerned government departments and other guests were invited to attend the proceedings. Since the ruling party controlled more than 90 percent of the seats in the House, the draft law was approved without any serious debate by M.Ps; it was finally published in the official gazette in late July. This law replaces the Federal law issued in 1997 and requires all killil land laws to be revised to be harmony with it since Federal law supersedes all legislation issued by lower bodies.

Before turning to the revised Amhara *Killil* land law which came out in May 2006, I would like to say a few words about the frequency of changes to the law having to do with rural land, its administration and use. While the basic principle defining land rights is contained in the Federal Constitution of 1995, there have been numerous laws issued at both the Federal and *killil* level pertaining to tenure, administration and use and this has contributed to the problem of institutional/legal instability noted above. In the Amhara *killil*, in particular, laws to provide for land redistribution was issued in 1996 and 1997; the land use and environmental protection authority, which is responsible for land matters in the *killil* was established by law in August 2000; and the law to define land administration and use was issued in October 2000. It is this latter law which has now been revised following the Federal law of 2005. Policy directives on land use and environmental protection, which are as binding on land holders as the formal laws, have been issued on a number of occasions in between these laws. There are at the time of writing only two *killils* which have issued land laws to harmonize with the Federal law, and these are Amhara and Tigray both of which published their legislation in 2006. Oromia whose land law was issued in 2002, and the Southern *killil* which brought out a similar law as recently as 2004, are in the last stages of completing their respective revisions, however, we cannot discuss either one or the other because they have not been officially published. We should note here that all these four *killils* are territorially extensive with large peasant populations most of whom are to be found in areas inaccessible by modern transport. The dissemination of the contents of any law to the peasantry is thus a long and difficult process. Many peasants in the South, for instance, do not have knowledge of the 2004 land law which is now being revised.

The Amhara land law draws heavily on the Federal law, it is thus sufficient to present here the main provisions that are relevant for our study (ANRS 2006). As in the Federal case, the *killil* law affirms the principle of state ownership of land which prohibits its sale mortgage or exchange, with the holder having only the right of use, a right dependent on residency in the ru-

ral area and engagement in agricultural pursuits. Use rights are also dependent on a host of conditions most of which having to do with what is described as "proper" land and environmental management practices. Holders who do not follow these practices are subject to a variety of penalties, including the loss of their right to the land. What these "proper" practices consist of are not stated precisely and in manner to be legally challenged; they are only broadly stated and thus provide ample discretionary power to state officials. Holders may also lose their right if they are absent from their farms and the land is left idle for three consecutive years or more. The right to rent out land is allowed but only for a short period of time, longer periods have to be registered in the kebele. Future land redistribution has not been entirely ruled out but now is subject to the consent of a majority of the land holders in a given locality. Articles 22 to 24 (with 21 sub-articles combined) describe the process of *land titling and registration*. The kebele plays a significant role since it is empowered to administer land in its jurisdiction, and to issue land certificates and maintain a land registry.

The settlement of land disputes is left vague but a previous law issued in 1997 defines the powers, duties and responsibilities of the kebele-based social courts (ANRS 1997). This is the lowest court in the country's judicial system and is empowered to hear and decide on a wide variety of petty cases brought before it by kebele residents, including land cases. Its power extends to cases where the monetary claims in any decision do not exceed 1000 Birr (a little over 100 US dollars). The judges to the court are selected from the community and approved by the Council upon recommendation by the kebele executive; they have the same term of office as both the Council and the executive. While the choice of judges from within the community is a positive measure, there is cause for concern with regard to the independence of the courts and impartiality of the magistrates. The social court has not been established as an independent body and this may in the long term compromise its credibility. Disputants may either take their case to the higher, *woreda* court directly if they think the case is beyond the competence of the social court, or may appeal to that court

if they are not satisfied with the decision of the lower court.

A brief examination of the legal landscape in the rural areas is in order here to place the arguments presented in this study in proper perspective. The Federal and killil constitutions provide the broad basis for human, democratic and property rights. On paper, rural as well as other citizens enjoy a wide variety of such rights though in practice the reality is much different. The variety of land laws noted above determine rights of access to land, and set out the legal framework for the administration, registration and management of farm and non-farm land. Peasants however do not have direct access to the constitutional or legal instruments; indeed legal documents are hard to come by for most citizens in the urban areas as well. Most peasants have no education and cannot read and understand legal documents even if they had access to them. More than two-thirds of our sample in Dessie Zuria, for instance were illiterate and only ten percent had enough formal education to be able to understand such documents. Moreover, there are no voluntary organizations or individuals in the rural areas that provide free legal service to peasants, neither are there active peasant organizations that farmers can turn to if they wish to get legal advice or aid. Indeed, there are hardly any independent legal service organizations in the country, though a few human rights groups based in Addis Ababa, the capital, are now beginning to provide legal aid to a limited number of poor people. Ethiopia is far behind in this respect compared with other countries in Africa and Asia (Manning 1999). The agricultural cooperatives that are active in most rural areas are handmaids of the government and are engaged primarily in the purchase and distribution of farm inputs to farmers. They do not undertake legal advocacy work, although they would be best placed to provide legal services were they to become free of government tutelage. There were twenty seven people who had been issued with permits to practice law in Dessie Zuria woreda but these were professional lawyers based in Dessie and mostly inaccessible to peasants because of the high fees they charge. Most rural woredas do not have as many professional lawyers, and the high number here was due to the fact that

Dessie is a large and important regional town.

Thus, in brief, the state acts both as the player and the referee. The task of *determining land rights and interpreting the laws rests with local public officials*, but -and this is an important point- since the government is both the juridical owner of the land as well as the source of the laws, officials are more prone to present a positive interpretation and to give a favorable reading of the law, and the chances that such reading may hide as much it reveals are quite high. In a politicized environment, such as we have at present, the law is more likely to be read less objectively and less accurately by local authorities.

Land Certificates and Registration

The Local Context: Dessie Zuria Woreda

With Dessie, one of the largest and oldest towns in north-east Ethiopia at its center, Dessie Zuria woreda, the district in which our main research was undertaken, is the most populous district in South Wollo; it has a population of 261,000 inhabitants. Aba Sokotu and Gelsha, the two kebelles where we conducted field work are located close to Dessie on the main east-west highway, and peasants here have benefited by the economic and market opportunities the town provides. The town has now expanded into the rural areas, and in the west, two of the rural kebelles adjacent to Aba Sokotu that were the site of the first pilot certification program were incorporated into it. This caused considerable conflict between the peasants, the land administration authorities as well as the town officials. We shall return to this further down.

Peasants in our two sites are quite atypical in a great many respects: their proximity to a major urban center, relatively better transport services, and their frequent travels to Dessie has opened up opportunities for improved employment and income on the one hand, and for greater social and political awareness on the other- opportunities denied to other peasants in more remote and less urban surroundings. Peasants here sell a wide variety of agricultural goods, as well as livestock. ~~Ember~~

and firewood in the Dessie market from which they purchase in return a range of basic goods and services. Some peasants are half farmers and half traders, and as individual plots have shrunk and the land available for farming has decreased more and more peasants turn to petty trading to earn income and maintain their families. But the town also provides many other benefits: greater chances for social interaction, for increased access to information and the media, and the expansion one's horizon and experience.

Proximity to a major provincial and district capital also means that rural communities are more accessible and hence benefit from increased visits by development officials both from the public and voluntary sector, and improved service delivery. Schools, improved health facilities, veterinary posts, farmers training centers, and agricultural extension posts have been constructed and functioning in both sites. Because of the special nature of the *woreda*, peasants here have also received more attention than those in other locations. In addition, peasants benefit from micro-finance institutions, the services of the main farmers cooperative (which is now the main channel through which farm inputs are distributed), and access to half a dozen or so development NGOs which run a variety of health, education, and environmental rehabilitation programs in the *woreda*.

An important public support program recently launched in many parts of the rural areas, called the productive safety net program (SPN), has been underway in Dessie Zuria and the two research sites since 2005, and in the district as a whole, nearly 30 percent of households are beneficiaries of the program. The program identifies chronically food insecure households, predominantly in the rural areas, and provides them employment and the opportunity to earn income on a regular basis. Designed to be part of the government's food security strategy and planned to run for at least five years, the program was initially aimed at benefiting some 5 million chronically poor households in the country but the number has gone up to 7 million at present. The main employment schemes are public works, environmental rehabilitation, and construction of ser-

vice giving institutions. Beneficiary households are also eligible under the program for a variety of assistance schemes delivered through a package approach to help them diversify their sources of income and to build up their assets. SPN is an ongoing program in which considerable resources are transferred to participating households (to the tune of nearly 200 million USD a year nation-wide) through the employment schemes, the package approach or both (MOFED 2005). Local officials are responsible for selecting beneficiary households, preparing the employment and package schemes, managing the program and distributing resources. This has been an unexpected "windfall", as it were, to local authorities because it gives them considerable power and influence over peasant farmers.

A major event that has shaped public opinion in the area is the land redistribution program carried out in Amhara killil in 1997, in which many peasants who were considered large owners by the authorities were stripped of large portions of their holdings and the land distributed to the landless or land poor. While it was welcomed by those who stood to gain, redistribution caused a good deal of turmoil in the rural areas, was bitterly resented by those who lost their property, and became a source of anxiety to others (Ege 1997). The program was carried out in full in many areas, but there were a few districts where it was either not implemented at all or implemented only partially. Both Aba Sokotu and Gelsha fall in the latter category where a small number of households lost their land and a few landless peasants received small allotments.

Land Certification

Among the first recipients of land certificates issued by Amhara killil in early 2005 were peasants in two kebelles in Dessie Zuria both of which located adjacent to our research sites. This was a pilot scheme and the culmination of a long process of preparation, both in the office and on the ground, going back to 2003. The purpose of the scheme was to test the feasibility and cost of using modern technology, and the experiment employed GPS techniques to demarcate kebele and individual

plot boundaries. However, the certification process was halted half way through when the land administration authorities realized that the two locations in the program had been absorbed into Dessie town as a result of a decision by higher authorities allowing urban expansion in the killil as a whole to a range of 15 km radius. This was poor planning on the part all public officials concerned and the pilot scheme in the district was abandoned with considerable wastage of resources. The decision caused a good deal of disquiet among the peasant households involved: those who had received their certificates did not know how secure they would be in the new circumstances, and those who did not, and they were many, were afraid of being dispossessed without fair compensation by the urban authorities since they did not have any proof of rights to their land. Urbanization poses a serious risk of land expropriation as service infrastructure, housing and other buildings will be constructed as part of the process of urban growth. It would also mean peasants will have to give up farming and face the risk of unemployment since there will be few opportunities for alternative livelihoods available to them. Angry protestations were made by peasants to the authorities concerned, including to the visiting Minister of State for Agriculture and Rural Development but without any results, and at the time of our field work the case was still unresolved.

Another cause of peasant disquiet that accompanied certification was the road building project that is being undertaken in the west of Dessie Zuria district. The highway linking the town of Dessie with the western part of South Wollo Zone is being upgraded and expanded to accommodate much heavier traffic, but in the process many peasants have lost their farm land, houses, and some common land which was used by the surrounding community for grazing and other purposes. The authorities responsible were willing to pay compensation to some but not to others on the grounds that the land adjacent to the highway was by law the property of the highway department; they cited an old and obscure law issued in 1944 in justification which few people outside the highway bureaucracy were aware of. They also argued that the commons were

no man's land and not eligible for compensation. Peasants were angry because they felt cheated: they had been farming those lands for over a generation and had their certificates as proof of ownership yet they were denied the fair treatment that they were promised by the certification program. The compensation offered for the houses and buildings on the land was seen as quite adequate, but holders were offered only small payments for the land itself because the authorities argued it was public property. I should note here that the certification program excluded common lands, which was a cause of dissatisfaction among many peasants.

These incidents may be seen as minor glitches in the certification program caused largely by poor planning and the incompetence of local officials rather than as inherent flaws in the program itself. This is true in part, but it does show that peasant insecurity is more deep-rooted and cannot be removed merely by issuing user certificates. Peasants are dependent on local officials for interpreting the law and interpretation is frequently made to suit the given circumstance. This is one of the factors for peasant subordination, and insecurity cannot be cured without addressing the causes of subordination.

Before we turn to the full story of land certification, we need to look at the issue of compensation and its payment. The right to compensation for land taken away by public authorities or private interests is high in the minds of peasants we interviewed in Dessie Zuria. The most important benefit that land certification has brought with it, according to most respondents, is the right to compensation. In the past, land was taken away for public purposes without adequate compensation being paid. The justification public officials use when they wish to take someone's land is *limat*, which may be loosely rendered as "development". There have been and still are numerous *limat* initiatives under way (too numerous to list here) in the rural areas, and each initiative requires its own *limat* office in addition to land for demonstration in the kebele and at times in sub-divisions of the kebele as well. For instance, water harvesting is one of the *limats* underway all over the district, and this has its own office in the kebele. There are two kinds

of compensation: in kind (ie. a plot equal in size to the one lost is offered in return), or in cash. Peasants often note that compensation in kind often means ending up with a plot poorer in quality and frequently more distant than the plot taken away. Land is a scarce commodity and there are no unused plots that are of good quality anywhere.

The compensation payment in cash on the other hand may be relatively better but it has its own faults. First, it was only in 2005 that a compensation law was issued by the Federal government; to date there are no comparable laws at the killil level and local officials on the ground simply make ad hoc improvisations, and as result there is a good deal of inconsistency. Strictly speaking, the compensation that the Federal law provides is compensation for displacement, and does not include the value of the land, hence it is not fair payment for those who lose their holdings. The justification is that land is public property and is not subject to compensation. A second cause for concern for peasants, particularly in peri-urban areas, is the expropriation of their land for investment purposes. This is not a particularly pressing problem in Dessie Zuria nor Wollaita at present, although we have seen the repercussions on peasants of the decision made to allow urban expansion into the rural areas. The Federal law provides that the local authorities have the power to remove any peasant from the land if that land is required by a private investor to establish an agricultural or industrial enterprise (see Dessalegn 2006b for details). In this case, it is the government that pays compensation and the land holder does not negotiate directly with the private investor; he/she would have gained more if he/she had the right to do so.

Let us now examine the process and outcome of land certification based on our findings from our research sites³⁵. For peasants, the process begins with an announcement in the kebele calling all land holders to attend a meeting on a specific date to discuss land and tenure issues. This was true in Dessie

35 See Solomom et al 2006 for articles about experiences in other parts of the country.

Zuria as well as in Wollaita, In Gelsha, one of our survey sites, the *formal announcement* was preceded by rumors that individual plots were to be measured and land reallocation would take place. At the meeting, *woreda* and *keblle* officials give a briefing about the purpose of the meeting. Peasants are then asked to elect four individuals from each of the ten *gotts* (or precincts) of the *kebelles* to the land administration committee (LAC). In both our sites, there were no women elected to the Committees, which consisted of 40 members each. After a brief training, the Committee, supported by *kebelles* and *woreda* officials, assumes responsibility for the main preparatory tasks of certification and registration, which include identification of individual plots, demarcation and boundary marking, measurement of plots, and recordings of personal details to be included in the land registry and certificate, such as holder's name and that of his/her spouse, names of siblings and heirs and other pertinent facts. Disputes may arise at each stage of this process and the LAC either attempts to resolve them on the spot or refers the case to the *kebelles* office. Four LAC members and two to three officials from the *woreda* and the *kebelles* office are deployed in each *gott* (or precinct) to undertake the preparatory tasks.

The first order of business is to identify the *kebelles* boundary. In the absence of maps or permanent boundary markings, and due to the fact that *kebelles* boundaries were redrawn on numerous of occasions, this is not easy task and has been the cause of conflict among peasants as well as among officials of different *kebelles*. In our case, the *kebelles*' area and boundary coordinates were determined using GPS techniques, which is not common practice and was only possible here because Dessie Zuria is a pilot district and had benefited by donor support. This was the only stage in which modern technology was employed, all the other tasks were carried out with the use of traditional techniques and crude tools. In Wollaita, some *kebelles* boundaries had trees and shrubs planted on them and these were accepted as being adequate to demarcate one *keblle* from another. Each land holder had to be present on his/her plots during individual demarcation and boundary marking.

The identity of one's land is determined in relation to the adjacent plots owned by other peasants. This is the most contentious stage of the process as farm plots in Ethiopia do not customarily have permanent boundary markings, and there are often disputes among adjacent holders about the exact extent of each other's plots. While the dispute may be settled during the demarcation process, this is often temporary and the dispute frequently flares up soon after.

In the steeper lands in Wollo as a whole and in Dessie Zuria as well, peasants use a traditional structure called *wober* as a plot boundary. This is a bund constructed along the contour and allowed to build up over several years and employed as a soil conservation measure as well. The structure is however temporary, and peasants plough it over to get access to the soil collected underneath which they think is rich in nutrients. The *wober* is then constructed elsewhere, and it is not uncommon for peasants to encroach on the neighbors' plots in doing so, and this has become a cause of constant conflict among farmers. A common method of demarcation used by the LAC was to place stones and lumps of soil on the boundaries, but these are moveable objects and proved to be inadequate to prevent disputes in many cases. In Wollaita the traditional system of planting a tree as a boundary marker proved useful in cases where this was still in place; in other cases, the same movable objects were used for plot demarcation.

The measurement of individual plots was the most unsatisfactory part of the certification process, and many peasants interviewed were critical of the manner in which their plots were measured. Plot measurement is fraught with difficulties in many parts of the country because even the simplest measuring tape is not available in most places, and different traditional methods are used by different officials in different places, thus giving rise to inaccuracies and inconsistencies. Two different methods of measurement were employed in the two kebelles in our study. In Aba Sokoru, LAC officials used what may be described as visual measurement to determine the size of farm plots. This consisted of the head of the Committee estimating the size of a plot by sight: no measuring tools were employed

and some peasants considered it as no better than guess work. Surprisingly enough there were no protests during the measurement as the results did not frequently go against peasant expectations, nevertheless, this was to cause disputes among holders after the certificates were handed out. In Gelsha, LAC officials employed ropes, strings and sticks to measure plots. A piece of rope or stick, measured by the arm, was taken to be equivalent to a given length in the metric system and this was the chief measuring tool in the kebele. At each precinct the arm measurement was done by the head of the LAC for that precinct, thus no two measuring ropes were of the same size. This was to be a cause of discontent here because as we shall see further down land measurement was accompanied by land re-allocation. In Wollaita, in contrast, regular tape measures were used to measure plots, though I have been informed that in some of the lowland areas, traditional methods were employed. However, informants here noted that a good number of plots were neither demarcated nor measured because of disputes over them involving claims and counter-claims.

The final task for the LAC in each precinct is the recording of the personal details of land holders and their families. Each certificate will contain the names and addresses of the household head, his/her spouse, and siblings or other relations in the household, in addition to the physical and positional details of the land. While there are no specific rules on the matter, peasants have been told by local officials that relations whose names do not appear in the certificate will not have the right to inherit the land. These same details are recorded in the land registry, copies of which are kept in the kebele and woreda office. The certificate also contains brief summaries of the rights and obligations of land holders and the conditions under which certificates may be withdrawn. In most cases it took about a year from the time the preparatory tasks were completed to the time when the user certificates were finally distributed to individual holders. In contrast, land holders in Wollaita got their certificates one or two months after the end of the process.

It has been argued by some that the country's land titling

and registration program has been a success in part because local authorities employed low cost techniques and familiar methods to complete the preparatory tasks (World Bank 2005, Deininger et al. 2007). But this is a misunderstanding of the whole point of the program: title registration is meant to provide security and to minimize disputes, and this can only be possible if the program is credible in the eyes of the beneficiaries concerned. The use of low cost traditional tools and techniques is not a problem in itself, but such techniques do not deliver accurate, consistent and reliable results, and are therefore liable to give rise to disputes and even bitter conflicts in the end. Moreover the system that has been employed is a static and not a dynamic one because it is not designed to be sustainable in the long run. This fundamental flaw will, in my opinion, seriously undermine its credibility among peasants. Sustainability means the capability by local authorities, particularly at the kebele level, not only to physically maintain the land registry, but to update the information in it as well as in the certificates in the hands of land holders. All records must be updated and kept current as changes in land holdings, plot boundaries and land transfers occur in the kebele. This requires considerable capacity both in terms of investment in modern equipment and trained human resources, none of which was visible on the ground. Moreover, there are costs to be incurred to manage a sustainable record system, but the land administration authorities do not seem to have given sufficient attention to this matter.

Land Rights and Tenure Security

Rights Awareness

I shall discuss here the significance of the main findings from my field survey undertaken in the north of the country. The findings are based mainly on data gathered from 110 questionnaires administered on a randomly selected sample of certificate holders in Aba Sokoru and Gelsha, but I shall supplement this information from in-depth interviews with key peasant

informants as well as with kebele and woreda officials. The in-depth interviews add flesh to the bare bones of the questionnaires and give better insights about many of the issues of concern to us here. Readers are reminded of the point raised further back in this study, namely that the peasants of Dessie Zuria have had the benefit of economic, social and political interaction with the urban world and are therefore more aware than the average peasant.

As was noted earlier in this study, property rights will provide security that is robust when they are an integral part of other basic political and democratic rights enjoyed by citizens and when they can be defended through the instrumentality of these rights. In our case, the legal instruments having to do with property and basic rights consist of the constitutions (Federal and killil), and the various land laws issued by both and currently in force. Rights awareness is an important element which will contribute to the robustness of security of tenure and is the basis for the empowerment of the poor. De Soto has very little to say on this subject and its significance.

One of the aims of our field investigation was to try to find out the extent to which peasants were aware of their rights under the law. Peasants in Dessie Zuria were asked if they were aware of the existence of the constitution and laws that defined basic political, human and property rights and governed access to land and other property. The intent was not to test peasants' legal knowledge in the deeper sense of the term but to find out about legal literacy at the primary level. What we thought were simple questions in the survey, however, proved to be quite involved since many peasants were not quite clear what a constitution actually was or that rights to land were also governed by specific land laws. Even after careful explanation, quite a number of respondents failed to understand the terms adequately. One of our key peasant informants, for instance, who has more formal education (fifth grade) than most peasants, listed five constitutions that he was aware of: the Federal, killil, Zonal and woreda constitutions, and the constitutions of lower and higher courts. He obviously mistook "constitution" for administrative rules or rules of procedure. Some of

the peasant informants interviewed thought many peasants in their community had a good deal of legal awareness while the others were of the opinion that this was not the case and that there was only limited awareness in the community. The former opinion is based on the fact that the land certificates contain a few statements setting out the benefits of the documents and the obligations holders have in respect of their land. These are by no means the full extent of rights to land contained in the relevant legal documents.

The findings from our survey provide a different picture. A little over 28 percent of our sample had not heard about any of the country's constitutions, only 20 percent knew about the existence of the Federal constitution, and 34 percent were aware of the killil constitution. On the other hand, nearly 32 percent of our sample did not know of any laws governing rights to land, only 12 percent were aware of the Federal land law, and 28 percent of the killil land law. For all practical purposes, peasants rights to land are governed by the killil law, and it is quite revealing that 72 percent of our respondents were *not* aware of it. Table 4.1 below gives a breakdown of the figures regarding peasant awareness of existing land laws. In Wollaita, on the other hand, all except one informant said they had no knowledge the laws or constitutions or knew any specific rights provided in either one or the other document.

Table 4.1: Peasant awareness of land laws, Dessie Zuria (%)

Laws	Yes, Aware	Not Aware
Federal land law	11.8	88.2
Killil land law	28.2	71.8
Federal and Killil law	25.5	74.5

Women, who made up 30 percent of our sample, were proportionally more ignorant of the law than men, but the margin of difference between the two, which was ten percent, was not very wide considering the fact that both communities

were predominantly Muslim. Peasants were asked how they came to be aware of the law, and the majority stated that it was through local state officials, with a significant number pointing to friends and relatives as their source of information, and a lesser number to the mass media.

Given the fact that there are no rights advocacy organizations in the rural areas, the task of raising rights awareness poses difficult problems. For reasons that we have noted above, this task cannot be left to the government if the goal is the empowerment of the peasantry. The NGOs based in the area –and there are over 30 of them in South Wollo as a whole- are engaged in service delivery and *limat* programs, and do not undertake advocacy work. They played no role either in the legislative effort or the certification process. In view of the fact that the great majority of peasants here (as well as in Wollaita) are not literate, providing copies of the relevant laws to individual households would not only be too costly but would be counter-productive. Public officials at the kebele level themselves did not have access to all the relevant legal documents, except a few photo-copies of the recent killil land law. They usually get to learn about new killil or Federal policies and legislations through periodic training workshops and briefings at the woreda office or occasionally at the killil capital in Bahr Dar. When we arrived for our fieldwork in Dessie, a team from the Amhara killil land administration authority had just completed a briefing program in Dessie for kebele and woreda officials on the new killil land law. This kind of briefing is not common practice in all localities, the exception in Dessie Zuria woreda was because of its special status as was noted above. Amhara is quite large; it is made up of 106 woredas and over 2900 kebelles, and to hold regular training sessions in all these localities and for all these officials would be a costly undertaking.

Peasants in both Dessie Zuria and Wollaita expressed a strong faith in the law as an instrument of security of property and of tenure. Nearly 94 percent of respondents in our field survey believed that laws can provide a guarantee for rights to land. Moreover, many believed that knowledge of the law was as important as the law itself. Peasants with whom we held ex-

tended interviews in both locations were of the opinion that raising rights awareness and providing legal literacy would help to empower title holders, enabling them to defend their rights and to promote their interests. A number of the informants in Dessie Zuria thought it would be best to employ the services of community organizations and religious leaders with a good reputation among the people for this purpose since these would be less costly and more accessible to the people.

Land Disputes and Dispute Settlement

It is often argued that the three most important benefits of title registration are guarantee of ownership and security of tenure, reduction of land disputes, and improved access to credit from financial institutions (Marquardt 2006). The World Bank (2005) found that the immediate benefit of land certification in the country was the reduction of land cases in the kebele courts, which are known as Social Courts. To what extent does the evidence we collected in our survey support these claims?

At one level, it does appear that land disputes and the burden on the social courts have been reduced. To the question about land disputes in our questionnaire, a great majority of respondents answered that there are less land disputes in the community since the certificates were distributed. The chief judge of the social court in Aba Sokotu, who was interviewed for this study, stated that there are fewer land cases brought before his court now than before certification. Almost all woreda and kebele officials interviewed were of the opinion that land certification has succeeded in reducing disputes among farm households. The most frequently cited causes of disputes were disputes over plot boundaries, inheritance, divorce, blocking access paths or transit corridors, planting certain tree species on boundary lines, and crop damage. The argument of those interviewed was that the land certificate clearly defines the boundaries of each holder and there is thus documentary evidence to make going to court irrelevant or unwise. But as we noted earlier, the boundary markings that were employed were for the most part movable objects and not permanent ones,

hence this has not ruled out boundary conflict. The second point is that *many of the cases of conflict* that were cited are not directly related to the records that appear in the certificates or land registry; they do not, in other words, carry documentary evidence.

A closer examination shows that the issue is quite complex and there is ample cause not for celebration but for concern. To begin with, there are two kinds of land dispute that are relevant to our subject: disputes among peasants, and disputes between peasants on the one hand and the government on the other. In terms of incidence and court case load, the first form of dispute is by far the most pervasive. There are a number of options available to disputants: at the simplest level, they can come to a settlement through the intervention of close friends and relatives, but the most common practice is take the case to customary dispute settlement institutions, i.e. elders, religious leaders, etc. Asked about where they would take their case *first* if there were land disputes, 80 percent of respondents said they would first approach local elders and community leaders. As a second option, 94 percent said they would take their case to the kebele office, and as a third option, 67 percent chose the local court. There is thus a strong tendency to avoid formal institutions in favor of customary ones. Aware of this preference for community institutions, decision makers are now attempting to incorporate these institutions into the formal sector. The new killil land law now recognizes customary dispute settlement mechanisms as *first-line options for disputants*.

However, as was noted above, there have been significant institutional changes that have accompanied land certification, one of which has been to give the land administration committees the additional responsibility of resolving land disputes. LAC members include local elders who are selected specifically for this purpose. Thus at the grassroots level, there are now initiatives to combine the formal and the informal. The new procedure followed when parties to a land dispute bring their case to the kebele is to send the case *not to the social court* but to the LACs which are established at the *gott* level. If the dispute is settled there, that ends the matter, if not the Com-

mittee will transfer the case with its written decisions to the social court. This has reduced the case load on the local courts but it does not necessarily mean that there are fewer disputes now than before. The chief judge referred to above noted that even now land disputes constitute the largest number of cases in his court.

Our findings in Wollaita present a slightly different picture. Prior to certification, peasants sought the services of traditional elders to settle land disputes. At present, however, all informants said disputants take their case to the LACs that have been established in each sub-kebele. If the dispute is not resolved here, the case is referred to the kebele social court, and from here it may be taken to the woreda court. The evidence suggests that fewer people now rely on customary institutions to handle land disputes.

On the other hand, the information we gathered from the Dessie Zuria woreda court and police station in Dessie, the woreda capital, reveals a more troubling picture. The court is responsible for civil cases while the police handle criminal cases. Cases are brought before the district court from all 31 kebelles directly by litigants, or referred to it by the social courts or on appeal from the latter. The chief officer of the district court, whom we interviewed in his office in Dessie, said he was very distressed by the high and growing number of cases coming before his court from the rural areas. He noted that in the great majority of instances these are cases in which land disputes play an important role in one form or another. The two most important land related cases were marital disputes, and inheritance (of land) disputes. In the last one and half years alone, that is in the period when land registration and titling was taking place in the district, the court heard nearly 1250 such cases, which is much higher compared to a similar period in the past. He pointed out that the number of appeal cases brought to the court from the kebelles are increasing. Our investigation at the district police station tallied more or less with the information from the district court. The chief inspector of the police, whom we interviewed, thought there was a rise in land cases brought to the attention of police. In the year

2005/2006, there were 1153 criminal cases involving land disputes recorded at the station, and this, according to the chief inspector, was a high figure for one year. In the last six months of 2006 alone, land cases numbered 550. Thus, if we add up the case loads in the district police station and court the number of cases in which land was at the center of the dispute is very high for one district.

Both the court officer and the chief inspector pointed out that in cases originating from the rural areas, the line separating the criminal and the civil is a thin one. If you scratch a criminal case, they wanted to say, you will find a civil cause for it. Both officials were quite concerned by it and they gave us several examples to illustrate the complicated nature of rural cases. For example: a case of assault involving two peasants is brought to the police station because it is a criminal offense. Upon investigation it turns out that the cause is a dispute over land. The court officer in fact believed that almost all rural cases, whether criminal or civil, are at bottom caused by land disputes.

Thus the picture that emerges here is of a rural society rife with conflict and antagonism on account primarily of disputes over land which title registration has not allayed. These disputes and their prevalence are indicative of a deeper social malaise and confirm the widely held view that resource conflict is more common among disadvantaged populations than among the better-off. They reveal profound insecurities about basic livelihoods and property rights, insecurities which have been aggravated by growing rural poverty, population pressure and scarcity of land, and limited opportunities for alternative sources of income. In these circumstances, one can speak of the structural embeddedness of land disputes and their pernicious effect on community relations. From time to time such disputes turn into violent conflict, taking on a religious, ethnic or clan form, as is happening in some parts of rural Wollaita at present. There has been a spate of violence that has flared up between clan groups here in which there have been lives lost and property damaged. The initial cause was minor disputes over land among individual peasants or neighbors.

The second type of conflict, i.e. between the peasant and the government, is of a different nature altogether. Peasant displeasure with government may arise due to decisions that lead to the expropriation of peasant land, to the imposition of an unpopular cropping, land management or environmental regime, or forced labor or financial contributions for public schemes – all of which are not uncommon. The average peasant knows that there is no mechanism, legal or constitutional, for redress of grievances when the party to the dispute is the government. The government is too powerful to be challenged, and besides all magistrates and judges are government employees, and there are few opportunities for a fair hearing or justice. There is an old saying which reveals the state's unchallenged power in the minds of the poor: just as one cannot touch the sky, so one cannot take the "king" to court (the king here means the state). We did ask all persons we interviewed whether they thought the government should be taken to court if peasants felt aggrieved by its decisions. Many did think the government should be taken to court but upon closer scrutiny we realized that there was confusion in the minds of many between the government as an institution, and the public servants who hold government posts, and the answer given was with the latter in mind and not the former. There have been a few cases in which government officials having been taken to court by peasants but the disputes were between the two individuals rather than between the peasant and the government agency.

In Wollaita, on the other hand, almost all informants thought the government cannot be taken to court. As one informant put it: land is held by the government, the government is also responsible for issuing the laws and appointing the judges to the courts, so what is the meaning of taking the government to court? The chief judge of the social court of one kebele interviewed for this study agreed: he thought it was not possible to take the government to court.

Access to free legal services was a subject on which we had extended discussions with key informants, peasants and public officials. In the survey, we asked respondents whether access to free legal services would help peasants defend their

rights better, and 71 percent answered in the affirmative, but 26 percent thought it would not. The provision of free legal service to the poor was considered by all informants as a capital idea but there were differences among them with regard to who should provide it and whether or not it would be accepted by the courts. Some thought the service would be acceptable by the courts if it was provided by the government, with a few suggesting that it should be provided only by the public sector. Some of the higher officials on the other hand thought there would be difficulties and that the courts would not be willing to accept it if such service was provided by the voluntary sector. Some peasant informants, who did not have a positive view of the courts, and who considered them as corrupt and biased in favor of the privileged, thought legal services, especially legal representation on behalf of the poor by advocacy organizations would be strongly resisted by the courts as well as local government bodies because it would be a challenge to their authority.

Land Certificates and Tenure Security

As was noted above, peasants do not have rights of ownership over the land, they have only use rights. Land rights here, in other words, are rights of usufruct only. Land registration and certification merely confirms the right of use of the land for the households' livelihood, and the documents handed out to peasants are strictly speaking user certificates and not land certificates in the proper sense of the term.

While land registration has been well received by peasants in both our research sites in the north and south of the country, and there are changed attitudes regarding land renting and leasing as a result, a good deal of uncertainty and insecurity remains and this becomes evident when one probes the matter a little deeper. Everyone is certain that they will receive compensation in the event they lose their land, however, not everyone is sure whether the compensation will be fair and commensurate. When land is expropriated by local authorities for public purposes or *limat* – and this is not infrequent

– compensation is often paid in kind, i.e. the peasant receives land supposed to be of equal value with the one he/she has lost. Local authorities simply do not have financial resources to be able to pay compensation in cash. However, there is scarcely any farm land to distribute in either of our research sites, hence peasants are offered land which is of poor quality and in some cases not really suitable for farming. Cash payments for compensation are offered only if land expropriation is undertaken at the request of a private investor, or if the land is needed for large scale public projects such roads, dams, urban housing, etc.

Peasants are also not sure of future government intentions and plans: whether there will be new land redistributions or new infrastructure projects that may involve land alienation, are questions that are on the minds of many. There is no tradition of consultation with rural communities when new initiative are planned, on the contrary the common practice under the present and previous governments has been for new programs to be imposed from above, frequently without even the local authorities concerned being informed about it or adequately prepared. Peasants are almost always the last to know, and they are informed only when implementation is to be undertaken. Almost all peasants in our two research locations said they heard about land registration when they were called to attend a general meeting to elect the committee that was to be responsible for implementing it. Administrative decentralization, briefly noted above, has given local authorities a little more freedom of action in terms of program management and implementation, budget preparation and use, nevertheless, it has not done away with top-down decision making because lower level officials are still dependent on higher authorities for development and other program initiatives as well as financial resources.

There is another issue that is important but is often ignored, namely demographic growth and resource scarcity. The subject of population pressure as a factor in aggravating insecurity of rights to land, with or without formalization, has not been given sufficient attention in the current debate. Unrelent-

ing population growth and increasing scarcity of land, which are really two sides of the same coin, is a serious concern to many peasants in the country, but it is an immediate and pressing danger in Wollaita in particular where the severity of the demographic stress is approaching catastrophic levels. Here, household plots are shrinking in size, the fertility of the soil is declining steadily, and farm incomes are getting smaller- but at the same time there are more mouths to feed every year (Bush 2002, Eyasu 2002). Hunger is widespread, and starvation is a constant danger but has been averted thanks to timely interventions by government and the voluntary sector (in the form of food aid and safety net schemes). The threat of the loss or erosion of rights to land hangs over most peasants in Wollaita on account of poverty made worse by micro-holdings and decreasing household income. This fear has not been mitigated in any significant way by land certification. Distress sales of agricultural produce, including the harvest are widespread; similarly, distress sales of land, which are carried out surreptitiously, are known to take place occasionally. Distress land transactions, not uncommon in the past, still persist, where the poor are driven to give up a good deal of their rights to the land for a small return. There are strong pressures on holders with small plots to transfer their land to others either temporarily or for longer periods. The size of the landless population is higher here than in many other places, and this is a cause of apprehension and insecurity for land holders because they fear that the government may carry out land redistribution to accommodate the landless.

Partly as a result of the demographic danger, peasants in Wollaita are less enthusiastic about land certification than those in Dessie Zuria. Asked about the most pressing problems in their community, Wollaita peasants cited population pressure and land shortage on the one hand, and soil fertility decline on the other as being paramount. While all are in favor of title registration, some are skeptical about its long term benefits in the light of the demographic stress and the increasing vulnerability of households. A few of our informants here were apprehensive that the benefits of the certificates would soon be

eroded by demographic pressure. The problem is compounded by customary inheritance rules. In most parts of Wollaita, partible, *pre-mortem* inheritance is the rule: i.e. household heads divide up their land equally and distribute it to male siblings during their own lifetime (and not after their death). This means a family may divide its possessions to four or more male heirs and end up landless in the process. In this situation, land certificates are of little value.

We asked respondents in our survey in Dessie Zuria whether they thought future land redistribution was likely now that they had received their certificates and the registration program has been completed. The answers we received were quite revealing of their apprehensions: more than 44 percent thought redistribution was likely while 29 percent were of the opposite mind. The details are given in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Peasant views on future land redistribution, Dessie Zuria

Views	Number	Percent
Not Applicable	1	0.9
Redistribution Likely	49	44.5
Redistribution Unlikely	32	29.1
Do not know/Not sure	28	25.5
Total	110	100.0

It could be argued that those who said they were not sure were not expressing full confidence and if we add this group to those who said redistribution is likely, we find a very high degree of uncertainty among peasants in the survey. On the other hand, many kebele and woreda officials believed land redistribution was unlikely but a significant minority, including higher officials, thought that redistribution could take place in the future if there were good grounds for it. In Wollaita, nearly half of our informants thought the government will take away their land if it wants to despite title registration.

Land redistribution did in fact take place along with land certification in Gelsha kebele, one of our survey sites. There was no legal basis for it nor was it an integral part of title registration, on the contrary, it was undertaken at the *discretion of local officials*. The kebele authorities here decided that no household should possess land that was more than sufficient for its subsistence, which was determined by adopting a minimum holding size of 0.49 ha. A household's land size was based on this minimum with allowances made for the number of registered members in it, and any land in excess was taken away and distributed to the needy. The size of land of each household was measured using crude methods as was described earlier. While we do not have exact figures, it was clear that a good number of households were dispossessed. There were also land relocations: households said to have large holdings and in distant locations were offered land nearer their homes in exchange for giving up their distant plots. On occasions, however, the land offered in exchange was of poorer quality. One of our peasant informants in Gelsha told us that he had 2 ha of land before registration, but the authorities took away half of it and gave him one hectare of land near his homestead. He was disappointed but did not complain and thanked his stars because the land he was offered was of good quality. He said others were not as fortunate.

Table 4.3: Peasant views on whether land will be taken away, Dessie Zuria

Views	Number	Percent
Not Applicable	1	0.9
Likely to be Taken	55	50.0
Unlikely	46	41.8
Do not know/Not sure	8	7.3
Total	110	100.0

Another important question that was included in our

survey had to do with the likelihood of land expropriations. We asked respondents if they thought their land would or would not be taken away from them. Table 4.3 shows the answers we received.

Half of our respondents were of the opinion that their land may be taken away from them in the future even with the certificates, but 42 percent were more confident this would not happen. There have been frequent instances when peasants had given up their land on the authority of local officials, accepting the decisions without much protest. On a few occasions, however, such decisions have been contested in the courts by peasants (see next essay).

Finally, a word on tenure security. I have argued elsewhere that real and full security of tenure is affirmed when: a) the landholder has a right to the land on a continuous basis for good or for long enough to have an incentive to improve or invest on it; b) the landholder feels assured that his/her rights are not arbitrarily overridden by others, including the state; c) the holder has the freedom to use, dispose of or transfer the land free from interference by others, including the state (Desalegn 2004: 35). Measured in these terms, land certification has failed to assure peasants robust security that they had been searching for generations.

Conclusion

What we have attempted to argue in the preceding pages is that land rights go beyond the legal construct and extend into the political sphere and the sphere of governance. The formalization of land rights, in the form of registration and title, as in our case, cannot by itself guarantee robust security, especially for the poor who are severely disadvantaged in economic, social and political terms, and who do not have visibility, voice or negotiating power. The relationship between the state, which is responsible for formalization, and the poor is a relationship of hegemony and subordination, and this relationship will have to change to enable the poor to secure and defend their rights to property. The first step in this direction is empowerment of

the poor through their own effort and, as has been shown in some Asian and Latin American countries, the effort of social movements and advocacy organizations.

Empowerment cannot come about without rights awareness: this is not just knowledge about the law having to do with land and other property but also about political-juridical rights and ways to make use of them to ensure poor people's interests. Rights awareness must help the poor to enhance their visibility and voice: it must enable them to speak for themselves, to contest unfavorable decisions and to defend their rights. Such awareness can be promoted not by government agencies but by the poor themselves and independent third parties. The enhancement of rights awareness cannot be left to the government because, as we have argued above, that would in the end be counter-productive.

What is missing in de Soto and the conventional property law debate is the connection between rights on the one hand and the empowerment of the poor on the other. Without the latter, legalization will be a remedy without effect because it will not address the special circumstances of the poor; legalization must go hand in hand with empowerment if secure property rights are to be guaranteed. In Ethiopia, as we have seen, the subordination of the peasant to state authority is manifest in many forms and has been an enduring element of the relationship between the one and the other; it was in this context that land certification was undertaken. Formalization has not questioned the basis of the relationship but has assumed it to be normal and justified, hence its failure to guarantee security of tenure.

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LAND, LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND RIGHTS ADVOCACY

Roadblocks to Peasant Empowerment

Introduction

"Empowerment of the poor" is now becoming a safe subject for discussion in this country, and in recent years both the government and its supporters in the donor community have begun to speak of the virtues of empowering the poor and the extent to which rural programs have contributed to this objective (*vid.* World Bank 2005). Like many "safe" subjects that from time to time gain wide currency in the development discourse, such as grassroots participation, good governance, pro-poor policy, etc, empowerment does not provoke much controversy but is often talked about and rarely examined carefully, particularly in the context of local circumstances. The government is getting used to some of these current catchphrases, though it is a bit more cautious than others in using them. Its first poverty reduction program document, the SDPRP, claims that already considerable "space has been created for effective decentralization and empowerment" through fiscal federalism and economic reform and development initiatives. It goes on to state that in the course of implementation of the SDPRP, gender "equality will continue to be emphasized in the process of decentralization and empowerment" (MOFED 2002: 39). The local-level decentralization program that was under way at the time was described as "grassroots empowerment". Broad based citizen "participation and empowerment of the grassroots population" remains an objective in the current poverty reduction program, PASDEP (MOFED 2006: 184). Among

development workers in the voluntary sector, empowering the poor is frequently taken as an important objective and a guide to program planning and management (Agri-Service 2000).

In view of this growing interest, a closer look at the subject based on institutions, practices and emerging opportunities at the grassroots level may help to make the debate more focused and more relevant to the poor as well as their supporters. The focus of this study is the empowerment of the peasantry, but my purpose here is not to recount the progress made and the successes achieved but rather to explore why the chances for rural empowerment is a long way off, and what, in particular, the institutional and practical roadblocks presently are. Thus the work is not, as it were, a road map to empowerment but rather an effort to map the roadblocks to that objective. I shall examine the subject in the context of land rights, rural governance and voluntary organizations. I shall in particular look at the opportunities open to civic advocacy groups in the rural areas and the contributions that such groups can make to advance the cause of peasant empowerment. In this country, poverty is virtually synonymous with rurality, and the non-poor in the countryside are a tiny minority of the population. Hence the term "peasant empowerment" is inclusive and refers to the empowerment of the poor.

It is a widely accepted view (which I also share) that enabling peasants to determine their own lives is indispensable for the fight against poverty, and indeed for the development of the rural areas. The practice among public authorities in this country since the beginning of state directed political and economic modernization in the 1950s has been to consider the rural people, poor and rich alike, as mere recipients of government policies and directives, with few opportunities given to them to voice their needs and priorities. The state continues to be a dominant force in rural society not just in the public sphere but also in the private sphere pertaining to individual livelihoods, often enough restricting the voice of the people and their communities even in matters directly their own. The changes that have occurred in rural governance in the years since the 1950s have been varied and complex but none have

succeeded in reducing the dominance of the state in rural society. This explains in part the failure of agricultural development and of the modernization of the rural economy after half a century of public programs and considerable investment resources.

However, of late, due in part to state policies and liberalization measures, there are emerging opportunities that hold some promise for peasants and other rural residents both rich and poor. The main ones include a number of rural reform measures that have been undertaken in the last five years, a few of which we shall examine later in this study. While the openings these reforms provide appear to be small at the moment, one must take advantage of them for any benefits they may provide. Obviously, empowerment is a process and not something that occurs overnight, hence, any chances that appear need to be looked at in terms of their impact in the long term.

This study draws on the findings of fieldwork for an earlier work (see previous essay) and also on additional fieldwork undertaken in January and again in October 2007 in Dessie Zuria Woreda, South Wollo.

Peasant Empowerment: Framing the Issues

The general literature on empowerment is too broad to review here, and some of it is not relevant for our purposes anyway. The literature distinguishes many "varieties" of empowerment—in fact, the number may be dependent on the choice of subjects that one wishes to pursue. The main ones that are frequently considered are legal and economic empowerment, but one may cite political, cultural, and technological empowerment as well. Among those concerned with rights and advocacy, the subject of *legal* empowerment of the poor has attracted a good deal of attention. The recently established international Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor testifies to the increasing importance that the subject is gaining among both donor organizations and non-state agents³⁶. Advocates of legal empow-

36 For the general literature see references in USAID 2007, Golub

erment consider the law as an instrument of emancipation for disadvantaged populations. They place heavy emphasis on legal literacy for the poor and access to legal services to contest discriminatory or harmful measures by privileged groups, or public authorities through the courts and judicial system. Enhancing poor people's legal knowledge, and providing counseling, mediation, and litigation services constitute the main forms of strengthening poor peoples' capacities. The legal approach undoubtedly has a good deal of merit and cannot be lightly discounted, nevertheless, it is based on a narrow conception of empowerment. Enhancing poor people's capabilities through the legal process in developing countries involves a number of assumptions that are not supported by the reality on the ground. To begin with, the approach assumes that the legal and judicial institutions in these countries are independent, impartial, and efficient, and that the officials in them are untainted by professional improprieties. Not too many countries in the developing world have in fact the kind of judicial system that inspires confidence among the poor and that provides legal security to them. Corruption and other improprieties among judges, attorneys and court officials are not uncommon. Moreover, it is frequently the case that law enforcement agents fail to honor the principles of due process and respect for the rule of law when they concern disadvantaged populations³⁷. Indeed, it is safe to say that in many African countries, the rich, the powerful and the well-connected are frequently considered to be above the law while the poor and disadvantaged are often beneath it.

The emphasis on legal process is inadequate because the process does not exist in isolation, but rather is part of a broader political/jural system defining rights to justice, human rights and principles of governance. Where the political/jural system is undemocratic, discriminatory, or restrictive, this is reflected

2003; the Commission's website is: <http://legalempowerment.undp.org> (see mandate statements issued January 2006). For the World Bank's publications on the subject visit www.worldbank.org/empowerment

37 See Golub, and Manning 1999 for some examples.

in the legal instruments and judicial process. Thus to stress legal advocacy (i.e. knowledge of the law and legal aid services), as proponents of legal empowerment do, rather than rights advocacy, is to narrow the scope of empowerment. Moreover, the legal framework is often deficient in respect of disadvantaged populations. For example, in this country, some of the laws pertaining to marriage, the family, and employment and pension benefits, discriminate against women and contravene universal human rights conventions (EWLA 2001). Similarly, as we shall see below, the current rural land law denies the peasant full rights over the land, gives the state, which is the juridical owner, power over the land user, and promotes tenure insecurity.

Moreover, while providing knowledge of the law to individual peasants is useful such knowledge will be sufficient the individual to successfully argue his/her case in court. Knowledge of legal and court procedure and of the technicalities of specific laws requires considerable legal familiarity or formal training, both of which are beyond the competence of the average peasant and cannot be provided through informal "legal literacy" programs. In this respect, public officials at the local level are better off than peasants because these officials get to be familiar with the law in the course of carrying out their duties. Hence, as we shall see in the case of the women in our study kebele in South Wollo who lost her land, any contest in the courts between public authorities and peasants is frequently an unequal one.

Empowerment can serve as an instrument for the enhancement of human *agency*, i.e. the expansion of individual capabilities and voice, and enabling the poor to become active agents rather than passive ones as they are at present. On the other hand, the state in rural Ethiopia is *the* dominant active force, hence enhancing human agency in this context will require reducing the power of the state. This is important given the political history of this country. Indeed, empowerment in countries such as Ethiopia with deep-rooted authoritarian and patriarchal traditions has to enhance the realm of individual rights and freedoms as against the power of the state. Indeed,

empowerment should redefine the boundaries of the public and private spheres, and the intersection between state authority and individual rights.

More specifically, empowerment, in the active and practical sense in our context, should enable peasants to:

- defend and expand their rights and interests.
- hold government, particularly local government, accountable
- open up space for collective action by peasants, interest groups and non-state actors

Rights become meaningful if they are enforceable, and the enforceability of rights is as important as the rights themselves. But the chances that rights will be enforced are higher if there are vigorous peasant organizations and other civil society groups capable of taking collective action to defend these rights. Thus, empowerment must be seen in relation with collective action and the "instruments" for such action which can only be poor people's own organizations and rights advocacy groups that support their cause. Some of the literature produced by donor agencies and international organizations assumes that empowerment can easily be achieved if there is good will on the part of government and the right laws and policies are in place. I believe this is misguided: the poor cannot be empowered unless they engage actively to claim and enforce their rights

An important element of this endeavor is increased rights awareness. "Rights literacy", if we can use that term, is broader and more inclusive than "legal" literacy. The scope and significance of a given set of rights change in response to citizens' demands and as a consequence of economic and cultural development, as well as the increase of wealth and knowledge.

Roadblocks to Empowerment: Land Rights and Land Registration

Peasants and Land Rights

Land rights here means not only rights of control over and use of a given plot of land and the resources on it, but also includes the right to make decisions on the long-term sustainability of the land as well as on its disposition. The term thus goes beyond the narrow concept of tenure and extends to the intersection of environmental and land governance. Full and exclusive control flows from rights of ownership over the land, but there are other intermediate, conditional, partial or overlapping rights, each defined by law, custom or convention. Rights often involve responsibilities which may be set by the community or social group to which the rights holder belongs, by state law, customary rules, the dictates of sound management practices, or international treaties or conventions. Rights and responsibilities are robust if they cannot be overridden by anyone or group, including the state except in extraordinary circumstances and even then only through due process and the rule of law.

Secure land rights and sustainable land management are often ensured where rights and responsibilities are combined in one actor, whether that is a person, a group, an institution or corporate body. Broadly speaking there is more security where the actor enjoys a wide set of rights over the land in question. The more limited the set of rights, the more constrained the land system and the less freedom the user has in managing it. As we shall see further down, rights to land for peasant cultivators in this country are partial and conditional, with different actors having differing forms of authority over the same piece of land. Rights and responsibilities are dispersed over many actors and not combined in one. The laws governing land rights and land administration have been frequently changed, and inaccessible to most rural people, with few peasants being aware of their rights and obligations provided in them. As has been shown in practice, partial and conditional rights have limited peasants' time horizon and investment choices, distorted land

management practices, and created uncertainty and insecurity (for references, see Dessalegn 2004).. In brief, partial and conditional rights to land constitute the most critical cause of tenure insecurity as well as the main road block to peasant empowerment.

Since the radical land reform of the Derg in the mid-1970s, land has remained state property, and peasant cultivators have only rights of use over the plots they hold. The land system established by the Derg has remained intact to a large extent up to the present day, though with a few significant modifications. The Federal constitution issued in 1995 states that the "right to ownership of rural and urban land, as well as of all natural resources, is exclusively vested in the State", and land "shall not be subject to sale or other means of exchange." On the other hand, the constitution protects both cultivators and pastoralists from eviction from their holdings or displacement from their grazing land. Every citizen is assured full rights to private property, but these rights relate only to investments on the land, and to movable property, and not to landed property, the most important economic asset in the country (Article 40, sub-articles 1-7). The *Killils* have been given the authority to enact laws governing rural land administration and use in their jurisdiction but such laws must be consistent with Federal land laws, in particular Federal Proclamations 455 and 456 of July 2005 (FDRE 2005a,b).

Killil land laws spell out in some detail rights and obligations pertaining to land holding, its use and administration, as well as rights of transfer or disposal. They also contain provisions having to do with land redistribution, registration and certification. At the time of writing, all the four main *Killils* had formally issued new land laws following the Federal legislation noted above³⁸. All the laws share many ideas and provisions in common, and the following discussion is a summary of the commonalities that appear in all of them.

In line with the Federal constitution and land legisla-

38 For an earlier study of *Killil* land laws see Dessalegn 2005; for the *Killil* laws recently published, see ANRS 2006b, ONRS 2007, SNNPR 2007, TNRS 2006.

tion, all Killil laws stipulate that land is state property and cannot be sold or exchanged in any way. Rights of use for peasant land holders are conditional and carry a number of obligations, the main ones being the following: a) that the land holder is, or willing to be, engaged in farming for his/her livelihood; some Killils stipulate that land is provided only to those who are residents of the Killil; b) that the holder is resident in a given rural kebele; the residency requirement is less binding in Oromia than in the other Killils, which stipulate that holders absent from the kebele of their residence for three consecutive years will forfeit their rights to the land; c) that the land is farmed on a regular basis and not left unused for any length of time (the duration varies among Killils); d) that the holder takes "proper care" of his/her holdings, though what exactly "proper care" means and who is to determine it is not clearly spelt out. Failure to meet any of these obligations may lead to the forfeiture of one's land rights or to various punitive measures not clearly defined. Moreover, some Killils have imposed a limit to the size of land that a household is allowed to possess. The Tigray law stipulates that no one is allowed to possess more than two hectares, while the Amhara legislation leaves the determination of the size limit to future legal or policy instruments. Anyone found to possess land over the upper ceiling will lose the "excess" land without compensation.

One important aspect in which current land policy is an improvement over that of the Derg is that it allows limited forms of land transfers, the main ones being inheritance and renting. Land holders can pass their possessions to their heirs, however some Killils impose conditions on inheritance. The Tigray law in particular prohibits persons who already possess farm land, who are not engaged in agriculture, or who are urban residents from inheriting rural land (TNRS 2006). The right to rent out land either to fellow farmers or outside interests is not prohibited but it is circumscribed with a number of conditions, chief of which include limits on the duration of the transfer, and limits on how much of the individual's possession can be rented out. The Oromia land law, for instance, stipulates that holders can rent out not more than half the land in their

possession. Other Killil laws also require the notification of the relevant local authorities when the period of the rent is of more than two or three year duration, and any written contract signed by the parties concerned must be registered at the local kebele office.

One of the major causes of apprehension among many land holders has been the practice of periodic land redistribution. During the Derg, there were repeated land redistributions in many localities, with some having had as much as three rounds in the space of ten to twelve years. The present government has been a lot more restrained in this regard than the Derg, nevertheless, the high profile and contentious redistribution in Amhara in 1997 has left a legacy of insecurity and rancor among many peasants in the Killil, and doubt and uneasiness in other rural areas (see Dessalegn 2007). Redistribution has not been entirely ruled out in the new Federal and Killil legislations, though it is framed with a number of conditions which make it difficult to carry out redistribution at will as was the case earlier. The Federal law is less stringent in this regard than some of the Killil laws.

Rights and responsibilities over rural land are dispersed among many actors, each of which has some say over the disposition and management of land. As we noted above, rights of ownership are vested in the state, Federal and Killil, however, lower level public authorities have decision-making powers of various degrees. The *woreda* and *kebele* administrations have regulatory responsibilities as well the authority to alienate and expropriate land for a variety of purposes, as we shall see below. Moreover, these authorities, together with the Killil, have the power to decide, plan and carry out land redistribution. There are also a number of specific line agencies that have discrete powers over land, and these include the offices of agriculture, environmental protection, water resources development, investment agency, and in peri-urban areas, the office of public works and urban development. The humble peasant has the right of managing the land, which means essentially deciding on farming strategies, cropping plans, utilization of farm inputs, as well as matters having to do with land transactions

under the conditions set by law as noted above. Even here, however, there are occasions when local authorities intervene to impose on the farm household what it can and cannot grow on its land.

The Federal constitution provides assurances against the eviction of peasants from the land or pastoralists from their customary grazing areas, except where the land is required for "public purposes". However, Proclamation 455 of 2005 gives the woreda administrator the power to expropriate lands and evict peasants from them on the grounds that the lands in question are needed for "public purposes", or will be more valuable if they are utilized by private investors, cooperatives societies or "other bodies" (Article 3/1). The woreda administrator has the power to identify the lands for expropriation, without consultation with the land users concerned, or order expropriation on lands already identified for such purposes by higher Killil or Federal authorities. He is expected to establish an ad hoc compensation committee to determine the value of the land earmarked for expropriation. Compensation is paid, in kind or in cash, to peasants whose land is expropriated but almost all peasants involved are very dissatisfied with the compensation offered (AAA 2007). At present, a growing number of peasants near large urban centers or in areas of prime investment interest are being evicted from their possessions which are being leased or contracted out by public authorities to private investors. In other areas, peasants may be dispossessed of their land for a variety public purposes: for government service centers, offices, demonstration sites, etc. (for details see Dessalegn 2007)

I have been discussing so far what the law says but we need to pause and consider briefly what the law *does not* say, in other words, what the deficiencies of the legal instruments are. Many of the provisions in the land laws, including those provisions in the constitution pertaining to landed property, are not written in clear and precise language, but are instead full of loopholes and subject to ambiguities. Moreover, a number of key words, terms or phrases are not well defined or defined at all, and this is often a cause for confusion or a loophole disadvantageous to peasants and the poor. The term "public

purpose", for instance, is not clearly defined in the constitution or any of the land laws under discussion; similarly, neither is the term "proper care" in Killil laws which has been noted above. There is, further, no clear definition as to how a holder is deemed to have failed to meet his/her obligations and which public body is authorized to determine that such failure has or has not occurred. Proclamation 455 gives wide powers to the woreda administrator who is *not accountable* to any one, not even the woreda elected assembly, in respect of land expropriations. There are other loopholes and deficiencies of the legal instruments, a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper; suffice to say that the deficiencies give considerable discretionary power to local authorities and reinforce the subordination of peasants who neither have voice nor the means to defend their interests.

A related issue is access to the legal instruments themselves on the one hand, and the interpretation of them, on the other. The constitutions, proclamations and other legal documents produced by the Federal and Killil authorities are difficult to access even by people in the liberal and legal professions in the urban areas. In the countryside, these instruments are unavailable, but even if they were not, they would be unaffordable to most peasants, and in a predominantly illiterate society, few peasants would be able to read them. Thus, awareness of the law among the peasantry is very low, and as a consequence, the task of *determining land rights and interpreting the legislation rests with local public officials* (Dessalegn 2007). However, since the government is both the juridical owner of the land as well as the source of the laws, it is reasonable to assume that public officials will be unlikely to interpret the law objectively and in a manner that will be of benefit to the poor and the disadvantaged. They are, instead, more likely to present an interpretation and a reading of the law to suit given circumstances, and the chances that such reading may hide as much it reveals are quite high, especially where disputes involving holders and public agencies are involved.

Peasants and Land Registration.

The government has pinned its hopes on land registration and certification to provide tenure security to peasant farmers and to deflect criticism of its rural development policies by citizen's groups, academics, and the donor community. Land registration, which was launched in a limited number of localities in 2003, has since been turned into a massive program undertaken at an accelerated rate throughout the country. By the end of 2006 more than half the rural households in the country have had their lands registered and received user certificates. The program has been implemented for the most part without the use of modern surveying, mapping and cadastre technology, and the registration system in place at the moment is cumbersome and does not allow timely updating and efficient management, both of which are of crucial importance if the goal of an effective and secure system of land administration is to be achieved. There are a few pilot schemes, supported by donor agencies, in which GPS techniques have been employed but this is considered to be a costly undertaking which the government is unlikely to adopt without substantial financial and technical support from the donor community.

On the whole, peasants have welcomed the certification program, but interestingly enough the two main reasons given by certificate holders for their satisfaction were the following: a) certificates mean the right to compensation in the event of dispossession, and b) certificates were important proof of claim to a given plot of land in the event of land disputes. The government and its supporters in the donor community, on the other hand, expect land registration to achieve a wide range of objectives, of which the following are seen as significant: a) provide secure rights of tenure to peasant farmers and protect the rights of vulnerable groups such as women; b) reduce land disputes and litigation; c) facilitate land use planning and management of community and state lands; d) increase investment by smallholders on their plots; and e) provide better opportunities for access to credit services (Solomon Abebe 2006; Deininger et al 2007). It will be sometime before we have suf-

ficient evidence to assess whether or not these objectives have been fully achieved, but the evidence available so far raises considerable doubt in respect of these objectives, and, rather, confirms that in so far as peasant empowerment is concerned there has been very little change indeed. Let us look briefly at the available evidence but bear in mind that it is too early to make definitive conclusions since the registration program has been under way only recently.

Initial surveys of the land registration program prepared in 2004 and 2005 reveal a mixed picture with regard to the expected achievements. The works in question were divided on the issue of whether certification has led to greater tenure security. While some were positive others were skeptical (Mitiku et al. 2005, Berhanu and Fayera 2005). A work commissioned by USAID (2004) notes that landholders do not have strong tenure security even with certification as this would not prevent the government from undertaking periodic land redistribution. As far as land disputes are concerned, the findings are even more disturbing: it appears that certification has either had no discernable impact on land conflicts, or, as in the Amhara case, has aggravated conflicts (Berhanu and Fayera). With regard to the impact on women's land rights, the works were divided in respect of what has been achieved, with some noting that women were at risk during the process of certification while others arguing that women were one of the main beneficiaries of the program (Askale 2005; Berhanu and Fayera). Evidence was not available whether certification has led to increased opportunities for access to credit services or increased incentives for investment. On the other hand, there was broad agreement that there is insufficient institutional capacity at the local level where registration is processed and managed.

Since these works were issued there have been other works on the subject which have recently appeared, including a case of mine (see previous essay) and a national survey published by the World Bank (Deininger et al. 2007). Overall, the findings of the latter present a very positive picture in terms of the program objectives, arguing in fact that Ethiopia's successful and cost-effective experience provides valuable lessons

for other African countries. My own findings are different in many respects and suggest that land registration has not fully succeeded in ensuring robust tenure security nor providing full confidence on the land system on the part of peasant households. I argue that while the registration program has been well received by almost all peasants, it has not done away with many of the root causes of peasant subordination. Many peasants in south Wollo are still apprehensive that despite the certification program there could be another round of redistribution and this of course would involve losses for most of them. Indeed, in one of the kebelles of our study here, registration was accompanied with land redistribution in which many peasants lost land or were given poorer parcels in return for those they had lost. Moreover, land expropriation by public authorities, ostensibly for "public purposes", continued even after peasants had received their certificates. In terms of land disputes, registration has not had any significant impact. While the kebele social courts in our study did report a reduction of cases involving land disputes after registration, evidence from the woreda courts showed an increase in land cases in the same period. Finally, my findings indicate that land registration and the institutional changes that accompanied it have given local government increased authority over peasant households.

Roadblocks to Empowerment: Institutions of Rural Governance

Structures of Rural Governance

Current Governance Structures

The administrative structure of the country as well as many of the economic, political and other institutions have been changing continually for over a decade. Indeed, one can say that since the time of the Derg, there has been a great deal of institutional instability. Laws and regulations as well as governance structures have been changed and overhauled in quick succession. This instability will continue for some time, and the structures

described here may be discarded in the not too distant future.

The two tiers of government closest to the peasant household are the *woreda* and the *kebele*, both of which have been the object of administrative and political reforms since the time of the Derg in the 1970s. The *kebele*, the lowest tier, did not in fact exist in the past, it was born with the radical land reform of the Derg. It was created ostensibly to enable peasants to play a role in their own governance, i.e. to empower them, however, in the course of the centralization of power pursued by the military government it ended up as an instrument of state domination over the peasants. It was the *kebele* which was used, often in collaboration with party and government agents, to carry out many of the unpopular rural policies of the Derg in the 1980s, such as grain requisitioning, agricultural socialization, resettlement, villagization and forced recruitment of young men for the war effort. All three governments in the modern period, the Imperial, Derg and Federal, have been intent on extending their reach and authority over the peasantry, and the purpose of rural governance in all cases has meant enforcing state control and extracting the surplus- though this has been done with differing styles, approaches and justifications. Peasant memory holds a good record of the behavior of public authorities in each period and how the rules of state hegemony affected individual peasants and households, the farm economy, and rural resources.

The following discussion of decentralization and the emerging governance structures at the local level is based on existing laws³⁹, but the legal framework continues to be unstable and there have been a number of changes to the law even as the decentralization process was underway. I will first examine what is on the ground at present and then, at the end, look at the changes that are currently being planned.

Since 2001 and the devolution of duties and responsibilities to the local level, the governance structures of the *woreda* and the *kebele* have changed markedly. Prior to that

39 See the Killils' revised constitutions and other laws (ANRS 2001, ONRS 2001; ANRS 1997; 2006a; SNNPRS 2001)

there was rigid hierarchy of authority from the Killil, flowing down through the Zone to the *woreda* and further down to the *kebele*. This has now changed in a number of respects. The Zone has been bypassed and marginalized (the Amhara constitution does not even mention the Zone), and the *woreda* and, to a small extent, the *kebele*, have been given increased duties and responsibilities with regard to local administration, service delivery, program management, and budget utilization⁴⁰. The massive shift of public personnel from the Zones (and to some extent the Killils) to over 550 *woredas* stretched the government's resources during the first two years of the program, as most of the *woredas* were poorly endowed in terms of social services and basic infrastructure, and were located far from major urban centers which were favored by most civil servants. The process of decentralization has now been largely completed, and while it is an exaggeration to say as government sources do that this has brought about "grassroots empowerment", there has been considerable change in the structure and functions of Killil and local governments.

Government sources have attached many purposes and benefits for decentralization but the main objective of the program initially was to bring development effort closer to the local community and make service delivery more efficient and effective. The *woreda* has now become the focal point of local development planning and program implementation. It prepares and controls its own budget, formulates its own plans based on community needs and manages its own programs. The link between the *killil* and the *woreda* is now direct and not mediated through the Zonal administration as was the case in the past. Below the *woreda*, the *kebele* is responsible for needs assessment and service delivery and is considered to have direct links with the rural household. Some government documents in fact consider the *kebele* to be a key player in grassroots development though it is recognized that it suffers considerably from capacity constraints and needs a good deal of technical and

40 See the papers in Taye and Tegegne 2007. The Amhara revised constitution does not even mention the Zone. The number of *woredas* keeps changing as the local administrative map continues to be drawn and redrawn.

financial support from the woreda (FDRE 2001). Both structures are governed by elected assemblies and thus are expected to be democratic institutions. In reality, however, the picture is quite different as we shall in the discussion that follows.

The authority structures of both the woreda and kebele provided by the legal instruments are quite elaborate. In both cases, the main bodies consist of an elected assembly, an executive body (called the administrative council), and the court⁴¹. The woreda assembly, which, according to the law, is elected every five years and is accountable to the electorate of the woreda, is the deliberative body which has authority to examine and approve all plans, programs and initiatives concerning economic development, social services, public administration, and natural resource management. It ensures that all lawfully established taxes are properly collected, and scrutinizes and approves the budget submitted to it by the chief administrator. It also approves the appointment of the chief and deputy administrators of the woreda. The regular meeting of the assembly is once every three months. In Amhara, the term of office of both the woreda and Kebele assemblies was extended indefinitely by an amendment to the constitution issued in 2006 (ANRS 2006a).

The administrative council of the woreda consists of the two administrators as well as heads of the sectoral offices located there. This is the executive body of the woreda and is responsible to the woreda assembly. It is charged with preparing development and other plans, implementing programs approved by the assembly, and submitting annual budgets to the latter for approval. The chief administrator is the chief executive of the woreda. He (the post has rarely been held by women) chairs the meetings of the administrative council, oversees and directs the work of the executives of the kebelles in the woreda, and is in charge of the woreda police. The administrator is accountable both to the woreda assembly as well as the President of the Killil. This system of *dual accountability* is also found in

41. In the legislation, the term "council" is used for the elected and administrative bodies, which may be confusing, hence I shall use "elected assembly" and administrative council instead.

respect of kebele and other woreda structures, as we shall see below. The woreda court is administered by the Killil Judicial Commission and its judges are appointed by the Killil council upon the recommendation of the Commission.

There is a similar authority structure at the kebele level, with an elected body, administrative council, a chief administrator and court, except that in this case, the kebele social court, which falls outside the Killil judicial hierarchy, is accountable to the elected kebele assembly, which appoints the magistrates on the recommendation of the kebele chief executive. The kebele assembly is responsible to the kebele electorate *and* the woreda assembly, and similarly, the chief executive is responsible both to the kebele assembly *and* the chief executive of the woreda. The kebele enjoys much less autonomy and decision making power than the woreda, to which it is subordinate. The kebele administrative council consists of the chief and deputy administrators as well as other persons chosen at the discretion of the former but approved by the kebele assembly. The duties and responsibilities of the various units here are similar to those of the woreda. In Oromia, all kebele authorities, including magistrates of the social court, have a term of office of five years, but in Amhara, their term of office has recently been extended indefinitely.

Most of the woreda's budget is provided by the Killil, mainly through block grants but also non-block subsidies, and the woreda has the authority to utilize these funds in accordance with its own spending plans. The Killil in turn gets its budget from the Federal government. Thus, while decentralization is, structurally, a form of devolution, fiscally, there is still a good deal of centralization as the power of the Federal government is paramount since it holds the purse strings. A recent study argues that there is "high and sustained [Killil] dependency on central subsidy" as well as "central government domination of [Killil] expenditure and revenue assignments" (Paulos Chanie 2007). Similarly, the woreda is dependent on the Killil for the same reasons. According to Meheret (2007), by far the largest portion of the woreda budget goes to pay staff salaries and running expenses, with precious little left for

capital expenditure and expansion of services. He further notes that the budget in many woredas is inadequate to meet the increasing demand of the public for basic services. The kebele is dependent on the woreda for service delivery and development programs. It does not have any budget of its own nor does it receive any financial support from the woreda, except to pay the salary of the kebele administrator. However, the kebele is entrusted, by law, with the task of implementing development plans and programs initiated either by the kebele assembly or by the administrative council, and to promote rural development (see, e.g., ANRS 2001, Art 102), yet, it does not have any financial resources to carry out these responsibilities.

Local authorities are not only dependent financially on higher bodies but also in terms of development programs. The woredas are frequently used as channels for the implementation of programs planned and prepared higher up, many times in fact at the Federal level. The accelerated program of land registration, for example, which was launched on a national scale in 2002, was a Federal initiative, but its implementation modalities were planned by the Killil in which the woredas did not play a significant role. Similarly, the resettlement program, initiated early in 2003, involved woreda and kebele authorities only at the final stage, i.e. at the stage of implementation of the program -the selection process in the sending woredas, and the process of settling them in their new homes in the receiving woredas (see papers in Pankhurst and Piguet 2004). Indeed, most rural programs are undertaken in similar fashion throughout the country, with little variation in program approach, content and instruments, which is evidence that they have been planned at the top and channeled down for implementation, with local institutions having very little say on the matter. Thus despite decentralization, the system of *upward accountability* which governed relations between higher and lower units of government in the past, still prevails.

The law allows the woreda to raise its own revenue from local sources, but since it does not have the authority to levy taxes, the revenue in question can only come from natural resources over which it has jurisdiction. Most woredas do not

have any resources that have economic value that they can tap, but some may have small quarries, forests and woodlots which may be exploited to raise revenue. Woredas close to major and economically growing urban centers, such as Addis Ababa, Nazret, Awassa, etc., have better opportunities than other woredas because land around these cities is in high demand by investors, developers or public agencies. But such forms of resource exploitation may pose a danger in the long run. At the time of my field work in Dessie Zuria woreda, a community woodlot in one of the kebelles in my study had recently been cleared and the wood sold by the woreda. The woodlot was established through donor support on common grazing land belonging to the surrounding community but the community was neither consulted nor shared in the proceeds. Many peasants we talked to were very unhappy with the authorities and there were no plans to replant the woodlot. In the same kebele, the authorities had contracted a businessman to collect polished stone from a stream bed that run across the area. Both these efforts were attempts to raise revenue but in the long run such measures are counter-productive because they lead to the mining of the land and the destruction of the environment.

As we saw earlier, Federal Proclamation 455 of 2005 gives the woreda administrator the power to expropriate peasant land for private investment or government projects with compensation frequently paid to the evicted peasant by the local administration, but this is as a rule much less than the value of the land paid by the investor to the government. The woreda does not benefit in the transaction since the investor deals with the Killil administration or investment office directly. There may be indirect benefits however in the form of construction of infrastructure such as roads, power and communication systems if the investment project is substantial enough.

Planned Changes

According to a recent "good governance package" document issued by the Ministry of Capacity Building, there are a number of planned initiatives to reform the organizational struc-

ture of the kebele as well as the powers and duties of some of the offices within it (MCB 2007). These reforms will require new legislation as well as amendments to existing ones. The initiative provides for the establishment of a planning and supervision office at the woreda which will be entrusted with the task of supporting and monitoring development activities at the kebele. It also recommends the expansion of the kebele assembly to 200 or more members from its present size of 100. The most far-reaching aspect of the planned reform, however, is the reorganization of the kebele administration. The current division of the administration into sub-kebelles, gotts and development units ("*mengistawi bouden*") will be abolished for what on the surface appears to be a simpler alternative. There will be two main structures according to the new plan: the kebele executive (or *cabinet* as it is called in the document), and village representatives. The cabinet will consist of seven members, of which four will be elected assembly members. The new cabinet will replace the existing administrative council. As we saw earlier, both the kebele assembly and administrative council were set up under the constitution of each Killil, and thus the new changes will require amending the pertinent articles of the constitutions concerned.

The kebele will have four major committees, instead of the score or so currently in place, each of which will be headed by the assembly members sitting in the cabinet. These committees are: development committee, education and training (or education board), health committee, and justice and administration. Each of these committees is entrusted with wide responsibilities, more than a dozen in most cases and these will in the end require their own sub-committees if the duties envisaged are to be carried out. Thus what appears to be an improved structure will in the long run be more cumbersome, involving far more committees than at present. There will be a kebele secretariat and a full time, salaried manager responsible for running the office. At the time of our last visit to Dessie Zuria, managers were being hired to work in some of the kebelles including the two where we did our field work. The new initiative will involve what are called "voluntary development

teams" organized at the household level and functioning outside the formal kebele framework. These teams, consisting of 20-30 household heads, and for the smaller ones anywhere from three and above, are to engage in neighborhood-based agricultural development and non-farm activities, such as small-scale enterprises, cottage industries, marketing, etc.

The second arm of the kebele structure are called "development villages". The government is planning to embark on a program of villagization in the coming years, the legal framework for which was broadly set by the Federal land law of 2005. According to the plan drafted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in early 2006, ten model villages are envisaged to be constructed in a number of kebeles in each of the four main Kilils by 2007, and, based on this experience, Kilil authorities are to prepare detailed programs for constructing development villages in their areas (MCB 2007: Annex 2 for what follows). In fact, villagization is already underway in resettlement sites, though, due perhaps to the upcoming local elections, the program seems to be on hold in other areas of the country. While the program is supposed to be based on the consent of rural households, past experience shows that once the program is underway peasants will be pressured, in one way or another, to participate or face serious consequences. Initially, villagization will be undertaken (or completed) in resettlement sites and among people displaced by large-scale development projects, but later it will be expanded to involve annual crop cultivators and those in the enset-based farming systems. The plan does not envisage villagization to be accompanied with land redistribution but it is expected that some plot reallocation will be necessary since there will be peasant displacements and land alienation in the course of the program.

The justification given for villagization is that it will facilitate rapid improvements in living standards and accelerate community development, enable better access to basic services, create more interactive rural communities, and provide opportunities for more efficient use of land and other resources. This was more or less the same justification used by the Derg to un-

dertake large-scale villagization in the 1980s which in the end led to massive loss of resources and failed to create the development benefits that the program was supposed to bring about (Alemayehu 1989).

Each "development village" is expected to have access to a number of basic services: health, education, clean water supply, telecommunications, veterinary service, farmers training center, cooperative shop, and grain store. The kebele is also expected to provide adequate housing for sector staff working in the area, such as teachers, medical personnel, development agents, agents running the tele centers, members of the kebele cabinet and others. The kebele is expected to have a budget under the new plan, which it does not have at present, however, these investments are rather substantial and quite how the kebelles are to have access to financial resources is not spelt out. It is also not clear what the size of a development village is expected to be. In Dessie Zuria, the average kebele has a population of over 900 households scattered over a wide area. Bringing these into one village will create immense difficulties for the authorities and considerable hardships for the households concerned. Moreover, the experience of the 1980s shows that villagization, which was highly unpopular among the peasantry at the time, was accompanied by immense loss of resources, particularly environmental resources, with only limited gains in economic growth and other benefits.

These reforms have been planned by authorities at the Federal level, without much meaningful participation by or consultation with public agents in the woredas and kebelles, much less with peasants or their leaders. It is also evident that the planners and decision-makers concerned do not seem to have learnt from the experiences of the past. The organizational reforms will have adverse consequences when implemented, but by far the most costly reform will be villagization which will lead to the destabilization of peasant livelihoods and wastage of valuable assets which the majority of peasants in this country, who are poor and disadvantaged in many ways, can ill afford.

State Peasant Interactions

The MCB document cited above argues that local officials employ undemocratic measures in their relations with the peasantry and in administration work. Frequent practices include top-down decision making, with at best token consultation with peasants, lack of transparency, and disregard for the rule of law. Peasants are often pressured into participating in public work schemes and committee work without their consent, with the threat of punishment frequently hanging over them (MCB: 7ff).

It is at the kebele level that the most frequent interaction between the state and the peasant occurs, and such interaction usually takes a variety of forms of which I shall select three for examination. The first is (or was in some places) the program of peasant mobilization for the purpose of working on what the authorities describe as community projects. These include tree planting, digging ditches for soil conservation or other uses, land clearing, etc. In the second half of the 1990s, when such programs were underway throughout the rural areas, every peasant household was expected to participate in the schemes once a week. At present, the programs are less demanding and, in some places, have been phased out, however, a current government directive stipulates that peasants are to provide 20 percent of their working time to public work schemes (without payment) and 80 percent to their own livelihoods (*ibid*). Peasants are frequently engaged in these schemes not entirely voluntarily but through pressure brought to bear on them either directly or indirectly. They are invariably not paid for the labor and the materials they provide on the grounds that the projects are a public good and of benefit to them and the rest of the community. Often, peasants are not consulted in the choice of community projects or in the planning of the programs involved. To many peasants, this is similar to the forced mobilizations that took place during the Derg which were resented by many at the time. While the circumstances are different at present, these mobilizations are not popular in many areas, and the practice of free labor does not have wide acceptance since

the great majority of the people involved are poor.

Another medium for state peasant interaction is the cooptation of peasants to serve in a wide variety of formal and ad hoc kebele committees. According to MCB, there are over 24 kebele committees responsible for a wide variety of activities, ranging from disaster prevention, input supply, rural roads, to HIV/AIDS and sports; the full list of these committees is given in the Annex at the end of this study. In Dessie Zuria woreda, there are a number of important committees that assist the kebele's executive, chief among which are the land administration (LAC), and public order committees as well as a food security task force. Here, each kebele is divided into three sub-kebelles and ten *gotts* for purposes of administration and service delivery. Each gott elects ten persons for the kebele assembly which has a total of 100 members. Each gott is further divided into five *ye-limas bouden* (development units -formerly called *mengistawi bouden*). The *bouden* is a unit made up of 35 to 50 households. LAC and the public order committees, which are appointed by the assembly upon recommendation by the chief executive, are established at the gott level. The administrative councils in the two kebelles where I did my study consisted of 14 persons each, all male except one woman member in one of the kebelles. The administrator may establish other ad hoc committees or task forces, depending on the need. The LAC, which was responsible for the land registration process, also plays a role in land dispute resolution. Co-opted into the LAC were a number of elders from the community, and they together with the other members of the Committee heard cases and made decisions. Disputants were referred to the social court if the case was not resolved by the LAC⁴². The chief administrators in both kebelles were members of the ruling party, and many of the members of the

42 Minor land disputes were resolved at this level, and this may account for the reduced case load at the social court which some writers have seen as evidence of the success of the registration program (Deininger et al 2007). My findings were that peasants were bypassing the social court and taking their case to the woreda court (Dessalegn 2007).

committees set up by them are party activists, except the elders in the LAC. There was reluctance among ordinary peasants to serve in such committees because of the fear of being associated with the politics of the ruling party and marked down as a follower of one particular group. The ruling party is not popular in the kebelles which I studied, and anecdotal evidence indicated that a majority of peasants here voted for the opposition in the 2005 national elections.

There are other committees set up as part of sector program activities in the kebele, such as health committees, education committee, and parent teacher committees. Both these and similar ones are meant to support the work of the trained staff posted in the kebele by the woreda sector offices concerned. In some cases, such support may involve mobilizing the community to provide contributions either in labor or material to defray the costs of services, a form of cost-sharing arrangement not widely popular among residents, most of whom are either poor or destitute. In Wollaita, and elsewhere in south Wollo, services provided by NGOs, such as water points, health posts, and environmental rehabilitation schemes did not often involve this kind of cost-sharing; peasants engaged in the construction and maintenance work were frequently paid for their labor. Water users associations also exist in a few communities where clean water supply services have been established, and while attempts have been made to involve women in the leadership, not all the associations were functioning in a healthy manner at the time of my field visit.

The judicial institutions are another point of interaction between the state and the peasant. The land laws of some of the Killils give recognition to traditional dispute settlement institutions and, as noted above, there are attempts to incorporate the informal into the formal system of conflict settlement. We lack sufficient evidence to indicate how successful these efforts have been, but our findings in Dessie Zuria and Wollaita indicate that the picture is mixed at the moment. We asked peasants in Dessie Zuria where they would take their case *first* if there were land disputes among themselves, and 80 percent said they would first approach local

elders or traditional community leaders to resolve the dispute. Traditional dispute resolution institutions here still retain a good deal of support by the community here. In Wollaita, on the other hand, the opposite seems to be the case. Prior to land certification, peasants sought the services of traditional elders to settle land disputes. At present, however, all informants said disputants take their case to the LACs that have been established in each sub-kebele. If the dispute is not resolved here, the case is referred to the kebele social court, and from here it may be taken to the woreda court.

The formal judicial institutions closest to the peasantry are the kebele social courts and the woreda courts. Social courts were established by law in all Killils, and their competence extends only to minor cases with a pecuniary value not exceeding 1000 Birr. The term "social" in the name is misleading since the courts hear any and all cases originating in the kebele (see ANRS 1997)⁴³. These are in effect "community" courts and they are in a sense a replacement of the old Judicial Tribunals of the Derg. The magistrates of the courts are selected from the kebele by the kebele executive and submitted to the kebele assembly for approval. They have no legal training, and their formal education does not extend beyond the rudimentary level. The magistrates my team interviewed in Dessie Zuria woreda were all members of the ruling party.

While the choice of magistrates from within the community is a positive measure, there is cause for concern with regard to the independence of the courts and the impartiality of the magistrates. The social court has not been established as an independent body and this may in the long term compromise its credibility. Court proceedings at this level do not involve any costs for disputants, and the proceedings are simple and straightforward and do not often require the services of professional lawyers. The change of magistrates every five years that is required by the law is ill-advised since this will mean losing

43 As this study was being finalized, Amhara Killil issued an amendment to the law reducing the competence of the social courts. The courts now do not have the authority to hear cases involving land disputes (ANRS 2007)

valuable experience and knowledge gained through the training given to the magistrates. Be that as it may, most peasants interviewed in Dessie Zuria were quite satisfied with the work of the social courts, however, elsewhere in the country the picture is quite different.

The good governance document cited above contains an extended section on social courts, and some of the findings in it are based on a field survey in the four main Killils carried out by the authors in 2006 (MCB: Annex 5). The document is critical of the courts, and part of the blame is put on Killil legislators who are said to have misunderstood the original objectives of the institution as defined by the Federal constitution. It argues that the courts were not meant to be regular litigation courts, as the Killil legal framework requires them to be at present, but rather mechanisms for resolving disputes in their communities along the lines of customary mediation institutions. The findings of the survey conducted by the authors was that an increasing number of peasants have come to doubt the competence and impartiality of the judges and a considerable number now say they have no confidence in the courts. Over 49 percent of peasant interviewees stated that the judges are not impartial, that they are influenced in their decisions by the kebele administration, and that they take bribes and show favoritism to relations and kin. Some 65 percent stated that cases brought before the social courts take far too much time (sometimes as much as six months). To the question whether they have more confidence in the social or woreda courts, 66 percent said they have more confidence in the woreda, and only 11 percent in the social courts. Finally, one-third of interviewees reported that they have been abused and mistreated during their appearance in the social courts (*ibid*: 37ff). The document suggests that the competence and functions of the courts will have to be changed. Already as we have seen, Amhara Killil has passed legislation reducing their authority.

The woreda court, on the other hand is different in many respects. For poor peasants, it is, relatively speaking, more distant, more bureaucratic and more costly. On the other hand, we found that in Dessie Zuria, the number of rural land cases

brought before the woreda court had increased in recent years, even after land registration. This may be due in part to the fact that the woreda court has a higher competence than the social court, and peasant disputants may have hoped to gain by higher awards for damages. Nevertheless, here too, there is reason to doubt the independence of the court and the impartiality of the judges. We found, for instance, that woreda judges are put under pressure by senior officials in the woreda as well as judges from higher courts, and while we were not able to examine the evidence fully, we were given to understand by those in the know that such pressure does influence court decisions from time to time.

Case Study: Access to Justice for the Poor? Access to justice for the poor is quite difficult and redress of grievances through the legal system often costly and unfruitful. While some small steps have been taken to reduce the bureaucracy surrounding court procedure and improve access, justice continues to be highly partial favoring men as against women, the privileged against the poor. The following case study from one of the kebelles in our study in Dessie Zuria woreda illustrates this point.

As noted above, land expropriations by local authorities for a variety of purposes is not uncommon in the rural areas. The victims of such expropriations frequently are the poor, women, and disadvantaged households. The case in question involves a poor woman, whom we shall call LB, whose land was unjustly expropriated by the decision of the kebele authorities and given to a man who has considerable authority in the kebele whom we shall call TA. TA is both the chairman of the kebele LAC and a member of kebele assembly; he is also a member of the ruling party in the area. The present location of the kebele administration and other support offices used to be farmland, and TA along with others had a plot here which he had to give up when the offices were constructed. In compensation for the land he lost, the kebele authorities selected a plot of land located a good distance from TA's homestead and formally allotted it to him. The land in question, which the authorities as well as TA claim was ownerless, and which is known for its fertility and high crop yield, belonged to LB who had inherited it from her father who had died sometime ago. LB claims -and she has proof of this in her possession-

that she had been farming the land and paying regular taxes on it for some eight years. LB is divorced, has one baby, and lives with her step mother. She does not have any male relatives or kin support in the area. She is thus highly disadvantaged vulnerable, and the evidence indicates that this was one main reason why her land was chosen for expropriation. LB appealed to the woreda agricultural office, which is the relevant office in these matters, but the officials were unwilling to examine her case and instead advised that she go to court. The woreda women's association that she went to was similarly unwilling to help her. Finally, she decided to initiate court action at the woreda court. LB did not have the services of a lawyer, nor did she have any knowledge of court procedure or the technicalities of the law, all of which were to play against her. After five months and as many court appearances, LB lost her case: the court ruled that TA had been allotted the land by a formal decision of the kebele authorities and he was therefore the rightful claimant. It is quite obvious that LB lost her case and her land because she was a poor woman, because she did not have the services of a trained lawyer, and because of the greater influence and authority of her opponent. LB is strongly convinced -and she expressed this in no uncertain terms during the interview we had with her- that she was victimized by the kebele authorities, and unjustly treated by the woreda office and the court because she is a woman. The court proceedings were costly to her and she said she had to sell some of her food reserves to cover her expenses. During and after the court case LB received veiled threats from some of the kebele officials that she would lose more plots if she continued to protest, and for this reason and also because of the high costs involved she decided not to appeal to a higher court. LB's holdings have been reduced by half since she lost her fertile land to TA.

LB failed to get justice and in the process lost her land, nevertheless this was an unusual case for several reasons. There is a great deal of discrimination against women in the rural areas. There were no women in any of the important committees or offices in the kebele in either Dessie Zuria (except one) or in Wollaita. It is not infrequent for women household heads to lose part of their land on the grounds that they cannot manage it adequately; women are not supposed to plough the land, or do any of the more strenuous physical work. In most cases, women accept decisions that are discriminatory because of strong cultural pressures. The population in Dessie Zuria is predominantly Muslim and women are not expected to shoulder public roles or engage in argument with men in public. In practice,

however, women are quite active and often participate in public gatherings. The head of the district Women's Association based in Dessie interviewed for this study bitterly complained about the treatment of rural women by both local officials and the courts. She said women-headed households were unfairly treated during land reallocations, and the courts are known to be partial to men in cases involving divorce and property settlement. What makes this case exceptional is that in the first place it is only rarely that peasants contest the decision of local officials. The common practice is to *accept government decisions with at best some oral complaints* and show of disappointment. In the second place, the persistence of the woman to see the case through the courts, despite the odds against her and the costs involved, makes it worthy of note

District-level decentralization is an important initiative, however, at the moment it has not led to the democratization of decision-making in local affairs. This is mainly due to the overriding authority of the ruling party whose sway extends down to the community level. The opposition parties are not very visible at the local level, and in any case they are weak, poorly organized and unlikely to challenge the ruling party for many elections to come.

The dominant role of the ruling party in public affairs both at the woreda and kebele level is quite pronounced, and many public officials are members of the party. In fact, one can say that at this level, party and government are closely linked with little or no separation between the two. As was noted above, the leadership of the kebelles as well as active members in committees are members of the party; this is also more or less true in the woreda. The members of the elected assembly in both cases are either party members or have been supported by the party. Thus there is very little opportunity for alternative voices to be heard. Moreover, there is a noticeable Stalinist-communist quality in the party's behavior and working practices at the lower levels. Local members depend on instructions from above and there is a hierarchical cadre system - "democratic centralism" is the governing principle in the party, and as a result, the party has immense influence in decision making and

program management. There is a good deal of secretiveness and lack of transparency in party affairs, and party members are favored over others.

The party's strong presence in the administration and the Stalinist system that prevails has enforced upward accountability among public officials and within government structures. In fact, one may argue that there is a structural duality in the system of local governance: while on the one hand there is administrative decentralization, on the other there is a strong system of political centralization in place through the agency of the party, with the "political" having a strong influence in decision-making. From interviews with peasants during fieldwork for this and earlier studies it was evident that the party does not have mass appeal, and it is feared more than it is respected. There were reports in some of the private papers following the elections of 2005 that peasants suspected of voting for the opposition were harassed and intimidated by local officials in many rural areas. Peasant informants in the kebelles of my study said, however, that there was no harassment in their locality but that they had heard of such incidents elsewhere.

An enduring element of state peasant relations is the paternalist attitude towards peasants held by local officials and party activists. Indeed, paternalism permeates all levels of state officialdom, including authorities at the top, and this is reflected in some of the main rural policies of the government. The underlying assumption is that the peasantry needs strong leadership to guide it to the greater good of modernization, as well as to protect it from outsiders with evil intentions, or the foolishness of peasants themselves. The concept of partnership between the peasant and the state does not sit comfortably in official minds though it may be expressed in public records for donor consumption. Both these outlooks have contributed considerably to the subordination of rural voices.

Decisions affecting the lives of many peasants are frequently made at the discretion of local officials without consultation or going through the formal structures of governance as required by law. A prime example is land redistribution that was undertaken together with land registration in some ke-

belles, as noted above, in which peasants lost part of the land as a result. This is essentially unconstitutional, since peasants are protected by the law from losing their rights to land except for public purposes or if there is legislation providing for it, which there was not. There was no protest made or complaints voiced by peasants when redistribution was undertaken, except some muted grumblings by a few. Many were in fact relieved at the end that the damage they suffered was much less than they had feared.

Few peasants think in terms of protecting their constitutional rights in the event of adverse decisions by public agencies. This may be due in part to the feeling of helplessness against the dominant power of the state. The absence of robust property rights, especially in land, has also contributed significantly to peasant subordination. Rights to the use of land, which is what all peasants have, does not provide sufficient protection and security, and threats of dispossession have been used by local officials as an instrument to pressure peasants to accept government decisions and programs on some occasions. Robust property rights create the conditions for an assertive peasantry, and as noted above and I have argued elsewhere, land registration has not succeeded in providing such rights to the peasantry (Dessalegn 2007).

Moreover, there is very limited, if any, rights consciousness among the rural poor. This is not only because of low legal literacy but also because customary "political" norms do not operate on the basis of rights and obligations, and the idea that human beings possess inherent rights is not widely shared in rural society. Political norms here consist of social networks, access to sources of influence, knowledge of where the balance of power lies, and "proper" behavior which includes bowing to authority and not challenging its decisions even when the decisions are considered to be unjust and damaging. *Mengist* (meaning government or state) means some "body" with high authority to whom everyone owes obedience. "Mengistu" (he who governs) is a name frequently given to boys in many parts of northern Ethiopia. Thus to raise rights awareness among the rural population requires promoting a new civic culture with-

out which peasant empowerment will not be fully realized.

Civil Society Organizations in the Rural Areas

I have argued earlier that peasant empowerment is closely linked to collective action and advocacy by peasants and their supporters. Let us now examine the reality on the ground, in particular in the rural areas in respect of this issue.

A new reality in this country is increasing voluntarism that is evident both in the urban and rural areas, and rights advocacy organizations are part of this growing reality. In what follows I shall examine the opportunities and challenges of advocacy engagement in the rural context, but first a short discussion of the diversity of the voluntary sector at the kebele and woreda level⁴⁴.

The voluntary sector in this country is often broadly divided into two categories: the informal and customary on the one hand, and the formal and modern on the other. The first are to be found largely but not exclusively in the rural areas and at the kebele level, and the latter mainly in urban areas and the woreda, though here too there are many exceptions. The informal category refers to organizations which are small in size, loosely structured, and, as a general rule, not formally registered with the relevant government authorities. Within this category one may distinguish between customary institutions that have a long history, and non-customary ones which are of recent origin, having emerged in the last two to three decades and displaying some characteristics different from the customary ones, which include a tendency towards formality, attempts at modern forms of financial management, and greater linkages with the formal economy.

Rural communities are rich in associational life, and associations play an important role in everyday activities and in the social standing and acceptance of households and individuals.

⁴⁴ I shall use the terms "civil society organization", the "voluntary sector", "civic groups" or "non-state actors" interchangeably. For a broader discussion, see Dessalegn (Forthcoming).

The associations are all engaged in providing aid and support, services, and a sense of security to their members. The life of peasants is hard and full of hazards, and informal associations, together with solidarity from kinfolk and social networks, and spiritual solace from religious institutions help to make life a little less burdensome and a little more bearable. Civil society organizations in their modern form are not part of the rural world, though there is reason to believe that this will be changing soon.

The diversity of voluntary groups at the kebele level is notable. The customary institutions one finds are *iddirs*, mutual aid groups (*iqoub* is included here), religious societies and traditional irrigation management associations. Customary organizations have a limited mandate and a narrow focus and thus "inward" looking, with little competence, in their present condition, to shoulder broader responsibilities such as would be required in rights advocacy work. The non-customary institutions here include grain bank associations, irrigation cooperatives, micro-finance peer groups, savings and credit cooperatives (often serving women and the poor), and water users groups. In the formal sector there are state supported farmers' cooperatives as well as what officially are described as "mass organizations". Peasant associations, which were a product of the initial land reform of the Derg but which were subsequently transformed into instruments of the state, are now moribund though they have not been formally disbanded.

At the woreda level one may find farmers' cooperatives, government sponsored "mass organizations", CBOs, local or international NGOs, and, occasionally, associations of PLHAs (people living with HIV/AIDS), and professional associations such as teachers unions. The variety of organizations found in woredas depends on many factors, such as degree of urbanization, transport network, and location. Remote woredas with limited urbanization and modern infrastructure contain fewer organizations. The table below gives the distribution of voluntary organizations at the kebele and woreda level

Table 5.1: Voluntary Organizations at the Kebele and Woreda Level

No	Kebele	Woreda
1	Customary assoc (iddir, etc)	CBOs and Self-Help groups
2	Grain bank assoc	Mass organizations
3	Irrigation coops	NGOs
4	Micro-finance peer groups	Peasant coops
5	"Mass" organizations (women's assoc, etc)	PLHAs
6	Peasant coops	Prof assoc (teachers' unions)
7	Savings & credit coops	
8	Water users' assoc	

Source: Own field notes

Modern or formal organizations in contrast have legal personality, clear structures for decision-making and program implementation, and mandates that can accommodate broader concerns. The formal sub-sector is highly diverse and in this country it consists of four main categories (see Dessalegn Forthcoming):

- third party service providers: in this country, these are mainly NGOs
- those that primarily serve their own members: professional associations, Self-Help groups, labor unions, cooperatives
- grassroots or community organizations: CBOs, youth associations, formalized *idirs*, neighborhood groups
- rights and reform advocacy groups: human rights and governance organizations, other advocacy groups (environmental, and peace organizations), voter

education groups, legal aid services, policy research
and dialogue institutions

By far the most numerous organizations in this country are cooperatives, followed by NGOs, and the least numerous are advocacy groups. There is some controversy as to whether cooperatives should be included in the voluntary sector, since they cannot strictly be considered non-state agents as they are government supported, and, some would argue, they are profit making which violates one of the principles of voluntarism. Similarly, issues may be raised with regard to what are officially described as "mass organizations", consisting of women's and youth organizations. However, for the purposes of this paper we shall not enter into this controversy. Let us look a bit closely at both the informal and formal organizations at the level of the kebele and woreda.

At the kebele level, one of the most ubiquitous associations is the *iddir* (or *qirre* as it is called in Wollo). The institution goes by different names in different communities, and its traditional functions also vary from place to place. In some communities, it has only a burial function: it is responsible only for providing support to those who have lost family members or close relatives. In others, it may combine one or two other functions such as support when someone is seriously sick and needs to have access to health care. On the other hand, some *iddirs* in some of the bigger urban centers are undergoing a transformation: they are moving beyond their traditional functions and engaging in community development activities. Unions of individual *iddirs* have been formed to enable them to undertake local programs such as income generation, savings and credit, and environmental sanitation. There are a few cases where similar changes have been made by rural *iddirs* which have embarked on environmental rehabilitation and small-scale irrigations schemes (for the evidence, see Dessalegn Forthcoming). This kind of modernization of informal institutions is a welcome measure however there are immense problems faced by the institutions as they make the switch from an unstructured to a more structured form of decision-making

and leadership.

While the predominant form of cooperatives are those supported by the state, there are a small number of independent cooperatives in the kebelles. These are often saving and credit cooperatives, many of which were set up with the support of NGOs. These organizations, which have a small membership, frequently serve women and in many cases are managed by them. The peasant cooperatives in the rural areas have had a tortuous history, with the most trying times for cooperators being the time of the agricultural socialization program under the Derg in the 1980s. Cooperation was forced on peasants many of whom subsequently lost their land and were the poorer for it. The small number of rural cooperatives under the Imperial regime were established as part of the reform of the extension program and as a means for farmers to get input credit. But these disappeared with the fall of the regime. At present the cooperative effort is gaining momentum and, according to official sources, nearly 20,000 primary cooperatives have been established throughout the country (Federal Cooperative Agency 2006). The main functions of the cooperatives at present is distribution of inputs, marketing services for farm produce (especially coffee marketing- see Y. Kodama 2007), and providing credit to members. The number of cooperative unions (which consist of bringing together five to six primary cooperatives) has grown in the last half decade. Despite the progress made in terms of organization however, cooperatives are still burdened by shortage of funds, lack of management expertise and effective leadership. As a result, the organizations are dependent on state tutelage, and have yet to establish an independent identity and an assertive voice. I believe that rural cooperatives can play a significant role not just in improving the economic livelihood of peasants but also in enhancing peasant empowerment. To do this, however, they need to stand on their own feet which they have not been able to do fully so far.

The government has placed considerable emphasis on ~~women's~~ and youth associations established throughout the country under government auspices- the so-called ~~mass~~ orga-

nizations. These organizations are seen as having an important role in rural development and in improving peasant livelihoods. A key policy document published not so long ago stresses that mass organizations should be formed on a sound basis at the kebele level, and recommends that they should be represented in all planning and decision-making bodies including the kebele assembly (FDRE 2001). How far this proposal has been taken up is difficult to determine, nevertheless, the organizations are largely inactive at present, and have not inspired confidence or attracted much interest in rural communities.

Cooperatives and mass organizations are also found at the woreda level but in addition there are NGOs and CBOs active here. Community based organizations are mostly urban-based, and they are a product of the growing voluntarism among the young and the socially concerned which is much in evidence in most urban centers of the country. They are especially active in programs aimed at improving the lives of people in residential neighborhoods, in environmental sanitation, building recreational, sports and training facilities, and providing support to people living with AIDS in the neighborhood. CBOs often work with *iddirs*, religious societies or other customary institutions. This kind of active voluntarism is a new phenomenon in the country.

NGOs are frequently associated with vulnerability and livelihood crisis. Their activities combine emergency relief, rehabilitation of distressed people, and post-emergency development programs. The NGO presence in a woreda means that people in that particular woreda or the "catchment area" around it are or have recently been under stress, suffering food shortages due to social shocks, natural disaster, or pandemics. While the crisis caused by natural disaster occurs sporadically, the new or resurgent pandemics such as HIV/AIDS and malaria have created a crisis situation on an everyday basis. Both pandemics are spreading across the country at a rapid rate, aggravating poverty and destitution. Thus rural vulnerability is an enduring condition and NGOs will continue to be engaged for a long time to come. The increasing number of homegrown NGOs has brought with it a good deal of diversification, pro-

gram specialization and increased area and population coverage. Both at the national and local level, the voluntary sector is growing in number and diversity, reaching more people in more localities and investing increasing resources (Dessalegn Forthcoming).

While the beneficiaries of NGO programs have been the farming population, the exclusive concern of the organizations with aid and service delivery has left a void that needs to be filled. I am referring to the absence of advocacy organizations within close proximity of the peasantry and the failure to engage in programs to raise rights awareness. Even at the national level, human rights and governance organizations are relatively few in number and have limited outreach; legal services organizations are even less significant. A few human rights groups, such as EHRCO and EWLA, have branch offices in the Killil capitals and a few major urban centers, but otherwise the rural world which should have been a priority area for rights advocacy groups has been almost totally neglected. Admittedly, the policy environment has been quite hostile to rights advocacy in the country in general, and there have been more road blocks to such work in the countryside in particular, nevertheless, neither NGOs nor other civil society organizations have given serious thought to rights issues as an important element of their engagement with peasant communities.

I hold that rights advocacy organizations have a critical role to play in enhancing rights awareness in the rural areas. In this connection it may be instructive to briefly look at the work of voter education groups and their impact among the peasantry in the national and Killil elections of 2005⁴⁵. The elections of May 2005 were different and in many ways quite an improvement on those of 2000. The reasons for these were many and varied, but among them was the active engagement of civil society organizations, of which voter education groups working at the grassroots were the most important. The evidence indicates that these groups made an important contribution to the success of the elections and in particular to the strong par-

45 The discussion that follows is based on Dessalegn 2006.

ticipation of the peasantry in the election process. There are no official figures to measure the impact of the groups but some unofficial estimates indicate that the organizations, numbering about 25 in all, may have reached up to ten million people in the period leading up to polling day, the great majority of whom were peasants in the countryside.

Partly as a result of the work of these groups, as well as the opening up of the media to campaign debates and Opposition candidates, there was a massive grassroots interest in the elections that was not apparent in 2000. The result was a high level of voter registration that took place throughout the country. Figures available from official sources show that nearly 26 million voters registered for the elections of which 48 percent were women. This was at least 30 percent higher than in 2000. The same sources indicate that about 90 percent of those registered turned out to cast their ballot on election day (National Electoral Board website).

The programs undertaken by voter education groups were basic, delivered in a way that was easy to grasp, and uniform in content throughout the country. The main aim was to familiarize voters with the basic rules of democratic governance and electoral procedures. The subjects covered in most cases were human rights, democratic principles, voters' rights and the election process, and the role of an independent media. Gender issues were also mainstreamed into each subject. These were broad subjects but the objective was to present the salient issues in simple form to enable non-literate or semi-literate people to understand them easily. The teaching was conducted in the local language though the teaching aids were prepared only in Amharic, Oromifa and Tigrigna.

Different educators employed different methods to attract community people to attend the training programs. The more conventional approach was to rely on the cooperation of the kebele which often meant asking the kebele to call a meeting of residents of the community for training purposes. A different approach was to identify occasions and places where local residents were likely to congregate and hold training sessions there. These included hospitals, market places, places of

worship, and schools. In the rural areas, there are often a lot of people sitting patiently in hospital grounds waiting for medical attention and this provides trainers a good opportunity to undertake voter education. Quite often, there are more women in the audience here than in other settings. Similarly, market places were found to be convenient places to attract an audience. A more innovative approach was to employ what may be described as political drama to draw audiences. Yet another approach has been to undertake training near churches on Sundays and religious days: after the church service is over, it is not difficult to draw a crowd to listen to the training. Here too, there tend to be more women in the audience.

While the results of the elections have been hotly contested by the Opposition and others, everyone agrees that by all counts the Opposition has done immensely better in this election than at any time in the past. In 2000, it was able to win only 12 percent of the seats in the Federal Parliament. The official count declared by the National Electoral Board for 2005 gives the Opposition one-third of the seats. Opposition successes in the Regional elections were equally significant (NEB website). Voter education *raised poor people's awareness and built confidence among the electorate*, and because of this, voters were able to make free and independent choices on ballot day. It is safe to say that without this kind of voter confidence, Opposition candidates would *not* have been elected to Parliament and the Regional Councils in such large numbers.

The salient lesson to be drawn from this experience is that advocacy work, in particular raising rights awareness among the peasantry, is not an insurmountable undertaking. Admittedly, voter education is undertaken only during election time, and, outside of that, the rural areas have not been the focus of attention by advocacy organizations. This will have to change if the rural poor are to be able to stand up on their own feet to defend and enhance their rights and to determine their lives.

Emerging Opportunities

It is evident from the discussion thus far that under present

circumstances peasant empowerment will not be immediately achievable: there are, as we have seen above, far too many obstacles on the way and the process involved is complex and multifaceted. In the light of what has been presented above, I do not believe that the "single solution" approach, such as favored by the legal empowerment school, namely providing legal literacy to the poor, will be sufficient for the goal in mind. Where legal services are underway as a program of action they need to be combined with reform advocacy. Be that as it may, civil society organizations that wish to undertake rights-based programs among the peasantry should begin to explore the emerging opportunities in the rural areas, those that may provide openings, create enabling conditions and attract the participation of the rural poor. In what follows I would like to look at three examples which I believe offer such opportunities: these are local level administrative decentralization; the electoral process, both at local and national level; and the increasing social activism among a cross-section of society. An essential element in the endeavor for peasant empowerment is what I wish to call *collective action for public good or interests*, by which I mean action taken voluntarily by peasant groups in pursuit of common interests, in particular public goods that they, as citizens, are entitled to. The examples I have selected for examination are those which I believe will foster peasant collective action in the short or long term.

Decentralization

A significant policy reform that has been implemented in the last half decade, which has been examined earlier in these pages, is the devolution of responsibility and decision-making competence to the woreda, and, to a limited extent, the kebele. While the program has some deficiencies that will play against the interests of disadvantaged populations, it nevertheless is a welcome measure and stands as an improvement over earlier systems and past practices. In the past, public agencies providing services were distant and inaccessible to rural residents, and public services were considered not as goods that

citizens were entitled to but as beneficences bestowed on them out of the goodness of the state. Decentralization has changed that and while it is too early to judge what the outcome will be, it is evident that it will raise considerable expectations from the population. For our purposes, decentralization has created opportunities for collective action for the following reasons:

i) Local authorities, the *woredas* in particular, are now directly responsible for public services which they are expected to deliver to all citizens without discrimination. The same authorities are the ones charged with implementing reform programs at the grassroots level. Hence they can be held accountable by local residents who are expected to be the chief beneficiaries. At the moment, peasant citizens are not knowledgeable about issues of public accountability, nor do they have any mechanisms for holding officials to account for deficiencies in services and for failure to fulfill their obligations. But this is not a major problem but a problem of rights awareness and a question of time.

ii) The design and delivery of services as well as the impact of reforms and development programs can be monitored for their adequacy, quality, impact and cost. Monitoring public agencies is a complex undertaking and well beyond the means of the humble peasant. The experience is also lacking in this country, and this explains why civil society organizations here have not been able to undertake an effecting monitoring of the PRSP, the government's poverty reduction program. PANE's use of citizens' report card (CRCs) to determine individual citizens' evaluations of public services and programs is a first for this country and an innovative approach which can be used as an important instrument for social accountability (PANE 2006). But this involves considerable cost which cannot be easily replicated by those working at the *woreda* or *kebele* level. However, designing a simple but effective tool for monitoring local agencies at the grassroots level by community residents is not a difficult task, even though such tools may not be of high standard or of professional quality.

iii) Peasant citizens have the right to demand essential services such as, for example, clean water, which according to

PANE's CRC findings was a major concern of a great majority of rural people. Such is the level of poverty in the rural areas that the most basic services are scarce, and misery, extreme hardship and life threatening hazards are the daily lot peasants. In the words of a recent World Bank report (2007), Ethiopia suffers from "extreme underdevelopment" and the rural areas are "extraordinarily poor". Nevertheless, it will not be hard for the poor to understand that both as citizens and taxpayers, they have a *right to basic services* such as health care, education, and clean water, and the delivery of these in acceptable standards of adequacy and quality is the obligation of the government. Indeed, once peasants grasp the significance of the fact that some of the money the government spends every year comes from humble taxpayers like themselves, it will not require a great leap of imagination for them to take the logical step and demand rights of access to basic services.

iv) Demanding services in a formal way, through, for example, the instrument of local based organizations such as cooperatives can serve as a training ground for broader collective action.

National and Local Elections

There have been three national elections since this government came to power in the early 1990s, but only the last one, the May 2005 elections, deserve to be called competitive and relatively fair even though there were reported irregularities in many polling stations and the final vote count was highly controversial. In 2005, more political parties ran for seats, more voters cast their ballot, and more Opposition candidates won seats in the Federal parliament and the Killil councils than at any time in the past. Does this mean future elections will be freer, fairer and more democratic, or will 2005 stand out as an "exception" not to be repeated again? It is difficult to predict at this time, but any improvement that helps to make the electoral process more democratic will be of benefit to the peasantry in general, and, conversely, any adverse measures leading in the opposite direction can only be a great loss to all citizens of the country.

It is thus critical, in the light of the subject under discussion, that the electoral process continue to evolve in a democratic and competitive direction.

i) Elections provide an important opportunity for peasant collective action. A democratic electoral process will help build peasant confidence, and demonstrate their collective power to influence the outcome of elections, and ultimately, the system of governance and its personnel. The fight for a democratic electoral system has a bearing on peasant empowerment.

ii) Democratic elections can be a useful educational forum for peasants. Campaign debates and the discussions on issues of concern to the public that such debates inspire serve to raise peasant awareness. The realization that there are other, equally legitimate voices, is of great significance to peasants who are forced to live in closed circumstances. Moreover, as has happened in past elections, the education that voter education groups will provide will foster rights consciousness.

iii) Elections provide the opportunity for peasants to voice their opinions on issues that are of immediate concern to them: access to and adequacy of public services, the obligations of public agencies, the workings of local government, etc. They give peasants a chance to identify gaps or deficiencies in public programs and program management, and enable them to hold public officials accountable.

Increasing Social Activism

As has been noted above, there is currently a good deal of social activism in the urban as well as rural areas, which is coming to play an important role in people's lives. The diversity of the social groups that are products of this activism and their distribution in the kebele and woreda has been discussed earlier in this work and there is no need to go over the same ground again. These organizations, though limited in their outreach, are engaging and benefiting some of the poor, particularly, women, the young, the old, laborers, and the disadvantaged. In the rural areas, the majority of the institutions in question have

a short history, having been introduced by urban-based social activists, local or international NGOs, and public agencies in the last three to four decades. Along with these new institutions have come new organizational, management and leadership skills which peasants have had to learn and master as part of their involvement. Increased social activism creates a fertile ground for collective action because it fosters peasant confidence and encourages greater participation in the activities of non-state groups.

While customary institutions have been an integral part of rural life for generations, they are, in their present form, ill equipped to shoulder responsibilities outside their traditional mandate, such as monitoring public service delivery or engaging in collective action for the public good. Indeed, it does seem to me that they have limited potential for growth, change or for increased outreach, except perhaps the *iddirs*. In view of this, the focus of attention of rights advocacy groups wishing to work in the rural areas ought to be non-customary institutions, although one should not underestimate the difficulties involved in attempting to broaden the functions and areas of concern of *small and vulnerable organizations*, which most local groups are, especially if doing so requires new skills and extra effort and resources.

Conclusion

This study is written partly with rights advocacy organizations in mind, and partly to contribute to the debate on the subject of peasant empowerment and its determinants in this country. The existing debate on rural poverty in general has focused primarily on economic performance and access to resources, but while these factors are significant, the almost total neglect of factors related to human agency that is evident so far, has left a gap that needs to be filled. Rural poverty cannot be solved through the instrumentality of the state alone, but requires the active engagement of the poor themselves. Democratizations, property rights that are inclusive of the poor, enabling environment for citizens' groups, including poor people's or-

ganizations: these, individually or in ensemble, help to expand human agency, the agency of the poor in particular.

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Annex

List of Kebele Committees

1. Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Com
2. Input Supply and Credit Com.
3. Project Committee
4. Forest Resource Conservation
5. Food Security Task Force
6. Land Administration Com
7. Water Harvesting
8. Afforestation Com
9. Pest (Malaria) Control
10. Seed Multiplication
11. Hides and Skins Com
12. Rural Water Supply
13. Rural Roads
14. Land Tax Collection Com
15. HIV/AIDS Com
16. Parents Committee
17. Watershed Com
18. Public Order
19. Technical Committee
20. Education Com
21. Health Com
22. Purchasing Com
23. Red Cross Com
24. Sport Committee

Source: MCB 2007 (Com means committee)

THE PEASANT AND THE STATE

Hegemony and Agrarian Change

Looking back across half a century of "rural development" pursued under three different political, social and economic systems, one is struck by how little the rural economy has changed. Each system is different in many respects from the other, nowhere more so than in the language of power and the narrative of political rule (divine monarchy, Marxism-Leninism, ethnic federalism), nevertheless, there are also many significant features that all three regimes share in common and which give the agrarian system the appearance of timelessness. Peasant agriculture remains the backbone of the rural and national economy as it always was in the past, and except for the short-lived competition from mechanized agriculture in the imperial period and large-scale state farms and collectivisation in the 1980s, the peasant cultivator with his dwindling stock of indigenous technology is still the main source of the food and other produce that is consumed by the country's growing non-farm population. The agrarian issue has always been a political issue. The chief resource of the country still remains the land, and access to it has invariably been keenly sought by all concerned- the peasant, the privileged classes as well as the state- for the economic benefits this would confer as well as social and political dominance. The control of the land and its products has been the source of class power and the basis of the hegemony of the state⁴⁶.

The period covered in this work stretches over fifty years, and while this may be short in terms of the march of human history, it is fairly long in respect of economic development and

⁴⁶ This essay also draws on works cited in the preceding essays, and my own field experience of more than 20 years.

modernization. Some of the east Asian countries today started their development effort in the 1950s and took less than half a decade to lift themselves out of economic backwardness and achieve prosperity. It may thus be worth asking ourselves here what has really changed in this country over this time. An important change that should be mentioned right away has to do with property rights and property relations, both of which a legacy of the radical agrarian reform of the 1970s. The multitude and complex forms of rights to land that in the past encumbered the agrarian system was swept away and replaced by a unitary system of use rights and a regime of state ownership. The same reform was responsible for destroying the old rural class structure and creating an altogether different social landscape that is still visible today. Lastly, change has also come to the countryside in the guise of new structures of local governance and new political and administrative apparatuses, however, the institutions of rural administration continue to be cast and recast right up to the present moment.

But equally significant, if not more so, is the question: what remains unchanged and continues to affect rural livelihoods and economic and political relations? First and foremost is the relation between and the relative significance of the countryside and the towns. Ethiopia remains overwhelmingly rural (some 85 percent of the population lives in the countryside), but there has been some shift over the years in the "power" balance in favor of the urban areas, though this has not been strong enough to affect what I call the *rurality* of the country people. I submit that the continuing hegemony of the state and the consequent subordination of the peasant is in large part a consequence of the rurality of the peasant world. By *rurality* I mean not just rural life, which is what immediately comes to mind, but also confinement to the rural world, not through an act of choice but because one is deprived of any other opportunities. Under Ethiopia's circumstances, rurality means enduring poverty, voicelessness, and submission. Another factor is the continuing stagnation of the agricultural technology. Farm tools and land management systems have remained largely unchanged all through the period under review. There is in fact

some evidence to suggest that the stock of indigenous systems of land and animal husbandry may have dwindled due to increased land insecurity brought on by the radical rural reforms since the 1970s. There have been attempts by the Derg and the present government to promote improved farming methods and to popularize the use of agro-chemicals and high-yield seeds, but while the uptake has been not insignificant in recent years, these technologies have yet to be an integral part of peasant farming systems. Due in part to technological stagnation as well as other factors which cannot be discussed here, agricultural productivity has remained low and declining for well over four decades if not more (World Bank 2007).

Another enduring element in the agrarian system has been the hegemonic power of the state over the peasant. With improvements in transportation and communication, and the role played by state controlled political parties which came to exercise influence in rural affairs during the Derg and at present, the strong arm of the state has been extended to the far reaches of the countryside, far more so than at any time in the past. At the same time, family farms have grown smaller and poverty and vulnerability to hunger and mass starvation have intensified since the 1970s. All of these have undermined the confidence and self-regard of peasants making them more fearful and submissive.

Agrarian Change in the Last Half Century: Continuity and Change

The Imperial Regime: Attempts at Tax and Tenancy Reform.

Let me begin with a brief outline of the land tenure system during the imperial regime and the reform initiatives attempted at the time. I have examined the imperial land system elsewhere and I shall not reproduce the discussion here (Dessalegn 1984 and references in it). My purpose is to compare the differences and similarities of the system under the three regimes, and to highlight what changes were attempted and what their impact

has been.

The imperial land system was arguably one of the most complex anywhere in Africa and the diversity of rights of tenure, of obligations and transfer has been discussed extensively in contemporary works reviewed in my earlier work. And yet, seen from a "rights" perspective, the system was much less complex than it appeared to be. In a good many cases, rights in land were what I wish to call *reversionary* rights and rights of usufruct. These were rights of temporary use in which the final decision over the land rested with someone other than the user or immediate holder. In this system, the tenure holder, indeed the land itself, was encumbered with a bundle of *obligations*, contrasting sharply with modern land systems where tenure confers on the holder a bundle of *rights*. Tenure rights were predominantly conditional rights of use and not of ownership in the capitalist sense of the term, and the obligations in question included tax, tribute, and labour on the one hand, personal, military, administrative, political and ecclesiastical service on the other. Tenure rights conferred mostly limited rights of transfer (eg. to siblings by inheritance, to tenants for temporary use), and absolute transfer rights such as sale or purchase was not widespread. In the case of transfer to siblings, the heirs inherited not so much the land *per se* but the obligations on it. On the other hand, the legacy of the conquest and incorporation of the southern regions at the close of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the co-existence of forms of individual ownership of land free from many of the obligations noted here along with tenancy; such form of tenure also existed, in pockets, elsewhere. Most of the lands in question were small in size and worked by owner-cultivators, though in the south local landowners owned larger tracts which they rented out in parcels to tenant farmers. The system began to undergo fundamental but limited change from the 1960s when conditional tenure based on tribute, personal and military service was abolished (at least by law), and there was a gradual evolution towards rights of private and transferable ownership. This shift was spearheaded by the state itself, which encouraged holders of land granted by it as reward for loyal

service (*maderia* land for example), which ordinarily was held under conditional tenure, to convert part of it to freehold. At the same time, side by side with changes in the tenure regime came reforms in the rural tax regime and this had two major implications: one was that new taxes were added to existing ones (education and health tax), and second that the tax burden fell, in practice, not on the land holder but on the cultivator of the holding where the two were not one and the same, which was often the case.

We may classify tenure rights under the imperial regime broadly into three categories: land under what I call *reversionary* rights, land under private ownership, and state domain land. I submit that the greater part of the land in the country at the time was held under reversionary and usufruct rights, which were rights of temporary use in which the final decision rested with someone other than the user or immediate holder. Tenancies, *semon* (Church) lands, many of the various forms in which state domain land was operated, and some of the land held by members of the landed nobility fall under reversionary tenure. Even land under the *rist* system may be described as reversionary since the individuals had only use rights over their holdings, which they could not transfer to others by sale. The *rist* system, in its generic form, was a system where land was held by a descent or village group, members of which had equal use rights to the land, and where, in some localities, there was periodic reallocation of holdings.

A common approach in the literature here was to view the system on the basis of a North/South divide, where *rist* tenure was said to be prevalent in the north of the country and tenancy widespread in the south. This approach, while adequate for some purposes and often favoured by the imperial government's own agency, the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration (MLRA), hides some of the complex aspects of the land system, and in particular tends to leave out the sizeable population of small owner-cultivators and the immense holdings under government control frequently described as state domain land. The main sources of tenancy were lands held by the nobility, the local gentry, and the state. It was also

not uncommon for owner-cultivators to rent out some of their land to tenants, but this form of tenancy did not pose a significant problem because at bottom it was a tenancy among equals or almost equals, and was largely free of relations of domination and subordination that characterized the relationship between tenants on the one hand and the landed nobility and local gentry on the other. The nobility, who were almost always absentee owners, held large tracts of land, particularly in the southern provinces, almost all of which were parcelled out for rent to tenant cultivators. Tenancy was an onerous institution, putting immense burdens on tenant cultivators, siphoning off their surplus and causing a great deal of uncertainty among them. It was common for tenants to hand over to the landlord half or more of their harvest in the form of rent, and to provide labour and personal services to him or her as part of their obligations. More than 40 percent of all holdings in the country as a whole was operated by tenant farmers, while in some of the south-western provinces the figure was 60 percent or more (see Dessalegn 1984)⁴⁷.

A significant aspect of the imperial land system was the decisive power of the state both as landlord in its own right and in the authority vested on it by the Constitution to claim land that was deemed to be "ownerless" by the laws of the country. Such land included land held by pastoralists and others under customary ownership. Article 130 of the 1955 Constitution holds that "all property not held in the name of any person, natural and juridical, including all land in escheat, and all abandoned properties, as well as all forests and grazing lands" are state domain. Article 31 states that the "Emperor also makes grants from abandoned properties, and properties in escheat, for the purpose of recompensing faithful service to the Crown" (*Consolidated Laws of Ethiopia*). On the basis of this, all land utilized by pastoralists in the country fell under state domain which, according to Wetterhall (1972), would give the state

47 There are conflicting figures on the extent of tenancy. Data gathered in the mid-60s by CSO suggest that 55 percent of peasants in the country were tenants. Bahru argues that 50-65 percent of holdings in the country was operated by tenants.

control over nearly 65 percent of the land area of the country. Wetterhall estimated that, excluding the nomadic areas, the government held nearly 17 million hectares of land, of which 11 million was considered arable, which was equal to 57 percent of the arable land of the country. Of the total arable land under state domain, some 20 percent was committed, consisting in the main of land occupied by tenants and squatters, land allocated to large-scale mechanized concessions, and land given out in the form of imperial land grants. Wetterhall cites government figures showing that a total of two million hectares of government land was granted to beneficiaries in the post-war period- a figure he says is an under-estimate but which nevertheless was quite considerable and would have constituted over one-third of the total cropped land of the country by the end of the 1960s. It is clear that while the tenure regime here cannot be described as one based on state ownership, as it was to become following the Revolution (and as it still is), the imperial state was a powerful landlord and had a strong influence in shaping the land system at the time.

State domain was to be a cause of insecurity and resentment among a large population of pastoralist and peasants from the early 1940s, becoming exacerbated in the second half of the 1960s because of large-scale evictions of customary users. The strong opposition of Afar pastoralists as well those in the Humera area to the alienation of their land and its distribution to commercial farmers has been discussed elsewhere in this volume. Many of the beneficiaries of imperial land grants either evicted the peasants and herders already on the land, or turned them into tenants subject to the payment of rent. The threat of eviction hung over not only such peasants but also others as well because many landlords were encouraged by government policy promoting mechanized agriculture at the time. Tenants on government land faced the same difficulties and the same kind of exactions as other tenants. Insecurity was also a serious problem in other reversionary forms of land rights, in particular for peasants in the *rist* system. Hoben (1973) has shown the high degree of insecurity among land users in his study of the system in Gojjam. He has argued that the system fostered en-

demic competition, conflict, and litigiousness among *rîst* holders; it was, he says, a socially disintegrative force. Litigation to get access to more land both by the lowly holder as well as by the local gentry was rife- indeed, Joireman (2001) suggests that litigation was the chief means of getting access to more land for the gentry as the existing judicial environment favoured the well-to-do as against the poor and the disadvantaged.

There were many voices urging the imperial government to carry out reforms to modernize the land system. These included not just radical students, progressive elements within the civil service, MLRA itself, businessmen and professionals but also donor agencies, international organizations, and foreign friends of the country. On the other hand, there was a strong opposition from the landed classes to any measure that would threaten their property, and they considered reform of the tenure structure as anathema. Such was the power and influence of these classes that the regime turned a deaf ear to the demand for change. While agrarian reform was not a significant issue in the 1974 uprising that brought down the monarchy and subsequently put an end to landlordism, it is tempting to argue that the fate of the monarchy and landlordism would have been different had the regime listened to the voices of reform and undertaken a program of change that met at least some of the aspirations of the labouring peasant. But, while the result was far from adequate, a number of initiatives to change aspects of the agrarian were undertaken with varying degrees of success during the lifetime of the imperial regime, of which the reform of land taxation was the main one; an attempt to reform tenancy rights on the eve of the Revolution was a dismal failure.

Haile Selassie had been a reformist in the past, and on three different occasions he had taken measures aimed at restructuring land taxation and revenue collection. The earlier reforms in particular contributed significantly to the modernization of the political system that the emperor had taken strenuous efforts to promote from the early period of his reign. The occasions were the years immediately before and immediately after the Italian-Ethiopian war, on the one hand, and

the first half of the 1960s on the other. Historically, it was the form of tax and other obligations attached to the land that defined the tenure system; the tenure regime, in other words, was a tax regime, hence, land tax reform could be considered as equivalent to land reform. However, in the circumstances of the second half of the twentieth century, tax reform was woefully inadequate to meet the needs of economic development or the demands of social equity.

The country's traditional land tax system was noted for its great diversity and complexity. It was a cause of conflict between the landlord and the tenant cultivator on the one hand, and the landlord and the state on the other. In the latter case, the conflict arose in part because much of the land in the country was unmeasured and unregistered, giving rise to disputes over how much tax the governors of the various provinces and sub-provinces had raised and how much they had transferred to the state treasury. Before the reform of the tax and financial system, which began just before the war and continued in the 1940s, provincial and sub-provincial governors were responsible for collecting taxes which they were obliged to transfer to the imperial treasury after retaining a given percentage for their own administrative expenses. In the same inter-war period, the cultivator was burdened with a wide variety of taxes, corvée labour, and personal service. One Ethiopian student of the traditional tax system has listed twenty-three different kinds of taxes, dues and personal obligations that most tenants were expected to meet annually⁴⁸. The cultivators' burden was made more onerous because taxes were determined arbitrarily, and the demand for corvée labour and personal service was unlimited.

Two reforms of land taxation, one in 1929 and the other in 1935, are worthy of note. In both cases, the prime objective was to rationalize revenue collection and to channel a greater proportion of the taxes raised to the central treasury, though it must be noted that the reforms also promised to ease the bur-

48 Gebre-Wold Ingida Work; the discussion on pre-war tax reform is based on his and Mahteme Selassie's work.

den of the peasant cultivator. The first reform called for the measurement and registration of land, and made tithe payment in cash rather than in kind; tithe was henceforth to be the responsibility of the landlord and was to be levied on all his/her holdings, used or unused. The reform also abolished all unpaid service by peasants, and reduced the demand for corvée labour by prohibiting landlords from imposing it on the main farming seasons. A radical element of the reform was the promise of land redistribution: all unused land, or land in excess of a fixed size was to be distributed to the landless and the needy unless the landlord made a legitimate claim on such land, in which case he/she was to pay a penalty to retain it. The second reform abolished the plethora of land taxes in force and replaced them by a single uniform tax payable in cash. Henceforth, all landlords were obliged to pay in cash an annual land tax assessed on the basis of the size of their holdings. The reform deprived the powerful regional nobility and local governors the power to collect taxes; that responsibility was assigned to the newly established financial agency of the government. While the reforms were quite radical for the time, and while they promised peasant cultivators a number of timely benefits, they were not fully implemented chiefly because of the unsettled conditions of the time (there were a number of dissident voices in the outlying areas), the lack of trained personnel, and the impending conflict with Italian fascism which became the main preoccupation of the state following Haile Selassie's coronation in 1930.

There was a renewed attempt at tax reform in the post-war period when several pieces of legislation were initiated, of which the most important for our purposes was the land tax proclamation of 1942 which was repealed by another proclamation issued in 1944 (*Consolidated Laws* for this and what follows). These reforms introduced a relatively improved tax system that was centrally administered. Agricultural land in the southern provinces, which were the predominantly tenancy areas, was classified into three categories depending on the fertility of the soil (fertile, semi-fertile and poor), and a uniform rate of land tax and tithe was levied on each class of land.

In the north, the *rist* areas, the tax system was based on the tribute system in which villages and communities were responsible for collecting a fixed tax from their residents and members and handing it over to the government. Two additional taxes, the education tax of 1947, and the health tax of 1959 were introduced later. In 1967, a new legislation abolished the tithe (rather tax-in-lieu of tithe) and replaced it by the agricultural income tax. This legislation was to be responsible for the rural revolts in Gojjam and Wollo discussed elsewhere in this volume.

On paper, the tax regime that evolved out of these reforms appeared to be equitable and modern but in practice it was anomalous and a burden on the very cultivator it was meant to benefit. To begin with, those who were legally supposed to pay the taxes escaped paying by shifting the responsibility onto others (Lawrence and Mann 1966 for this and what follows). By law, the landowner was responsible for paying both land tax and tax-in-lieu-of-tithe. Tax registers contained only the names of landowner, and tax payments were recorded in the name of the owner. However, the tax burden was shifted to the tenant by including the land tax in the rent obligation and also by making the tenant pay "*asrat*" (ie. tithe) to the landlord to offset tax-in-lieu-of-tithe. The government was aware of this practice but was unwilling to do anything about it. Secondly, land tax payment differed from region to region as well as on measured and unmeasured land; the tax was lower on unmeasured land making land measurement an unattractive idea to many. Thirdly, some tenures such as *maderia* for example, were exempt from both land tax and tithe. Finally, all land properties of the Orthodox Church were exempt from paying all land related taxes (including education and health taxes), which were paid instead to the Church treasury by the tenants concerned.

The tax reforms introduced in the 1940s remained essentially unchanged for almost thirty-five years. The World Bank considered the tax reforms as "Ethiopia's most successful single land reform measure" (1973, Annex 12: 20), but as we have argued here and elsewhere in this work, while tax reform did

contribute to the emergence of owner-cultivators and large-scale private land ownership, it also kept many aspects of the land system intact with all its inefficiencies and injustices and was not able to address the strong aspirations of the labouring peasant. Considering three and half decades of uninterrupted rule, the record of the imperial regime in the sphere of agrarian change was truly pathetic.

Our second story is the story of a moderate land and tenancy reform initiative prepared and presented for legislation by MLRA but which was defeated by the combined weight of the landlord classes and the monarchy in the waning years of the imperial regime. The initiative was meant to address the concerns of the growing body of opinion favouring reform of one sort or another noted earlier and its failure was a great disappointment to all except those responsible for its defeat.

The beginning of the reform initiative goes back to 1961 when an advisory body called the Land Reform Committee was set up within the government to recommend options for institutional change. The most important reform proposed by the Committee was the improvement of landlord-tenant relationships, although it also recommended a cadastral survey and land registration on the one hand, and the imposition of a surtax on large holdings on the other. Later, there was a proposal for setting up an administrative agency to deal with land reform and administration, and this was duly established in 1966 as the MLRA, which took over the tasks of the Ministry of State Domain and the Lands Department of the Ministry of Interior (World Bank 1973). It was this Ministry that was charged with preparing a land reform proposal that would be acceptable to the decision makers as well as the powerful landed elements in Parliament. MLRA was strongly in favour of smallholder farming as opposed to large-scale agriculture, which it believed would lead to greater eviction of peasants from the land. The reform measures it was keen to promote from the last quarter of the 1960s consisted of the following: a) *tenancy reform to lighten the burden of the tenant and to provide tenure security*; b) *allocation of government land to small cultivators rather than to civil servants, military officers,*

and the well-to-do as was the case at the time, with plots not exceeding 2 to 5 hectares; c) land registration to promote security of holding; and d) limiting the size of land held by big landlords and distributing the excess to the landless and the needy. Of these, only tenancy reform was presented to Parliament for enactment (MLRA 1972).

The tenancy reform was drafted in 1968, revised in 1970 and 1971 and finally presented to Parliament in 1972. The most important provisions in the original draft were the introduction of written agreements between landlord and tenant, the payment of a fixed rent instead of the customary share rent, rent control, and compensation by the landlord for improvements made on the land by the tenant in the event of termination of tenancy. The final draft bill submitted to Parliament was a watered down version and only the compensation provision was retained, thus leaving the tenant in the same inferior bargaining position as before (MLRA 1968, 1972; see also Stahl 1974). Nevertheless, MLRA lobbied hard among MPs in the Chamber of Deputies (the Lower House) to get the reform approved and according to a knowledgeable source the great majority of them were willing to vote in favour, however, the bill was not brought to a vote because of the strong opposition of some of the powerful landlords in Parliament, and the personal intervention of the emperor⁴⁹. Such was the ignominious end of the one and only "land reform" initiative ever attempted during the imperial regime. Both monarchy and landlordism were to perish two years later following the popular uprising and the seizure of power by the Derg.

Radical Land Reform under Military Rule

In early 1974 the imperial regime was shaken by a series of mass popular protests, occurring first in the major urban areas but later spreading to the countryside. These protests were ac-

⁴⁹ Zegeye Asfaw, personal communication, August 1993. Zegeye was a senior official in MLRA and directly involved in the reform at the time.

accompanied by unrest in the armed forces, leading to a number of mutinies by soldiers and junior officers in several military camps. The committee of officers, known widely as the Derg, which emerged through these agitations eventually assumed the leadership of what came to be the Ethiopian Revolution. The aging emperor was deposed in September of that year and the Derg assumed power without much serious opposition. One of the Derg's thorough-going measures to dismantle the political and economic power and institutions of the old regime was the radical land reform of March 1975.

The radical land reform was launched on 4 March 1975, but the legislation did not appear in the *Negarit Gazeta* (the official legal gazette) until the end of April. Formal implementation began in some areas in May but in others several months later; in some of the more remote areas implementation was delayed for a year or more. There is very little information about how the legislation was drafted and took its final form. We have no evidence that the military officers who assumed the leadership had any plans to undertake a redistribution of rural property before they had deposed the emperor and assumed power. Moreover, the Derg did not promote any public debate on land reform nor seriously seek expert opinion or the views of interest groups or peasant representatives. The Derg in fact was secretive about most of its reform legislations all through its lifetime on the grounds that prior knowledge would, it believed, give the losers of the reforms opportunities to sabotage the measures. One of the most radical measures of agrarian restructuring in the country's history was thus legislated in circumstances that can only be described as secretive. Nevertheless, when the legislation was formally announced it was received with great enthusiasm by a cross section of society, with a great number of peasants participating in demonstrations of support in subsequent weeks and months.

The land reform is one of the most radical measures undertaken anywhere in the developing world at the time and may be compared in thoroughness and impact to the Chinese and Vietnamese reforms of the 1950s. The reform abolished all customary and formal rights to land and vested in the state

the power to redefine property rights and access to land. The core of the legislation is the provision that gives the state, as the trustee of the people, the right of ownership of all rural land and other resources and that prohibits private ownership of land. Rights holders were allowed only use rights over the land they were cultivating which they could not sell, mortgage, lease or contract out. Moreover, only under certain circumstances could the holder pass it on to siblings as the legislation provided that young peasants who came of age had the right to a plot of land in their *kebele*. Rights to land thus came to be rights of usufruct. Tenancy and other forms of subordination based on land ownership were done away with. The reform put great emphasis on the self-labouring peasant household and prohibited tenancy or the hiring of labour. The reform *abolished landlordism*, and this, in my view, is its enduring legacy and its greatest achievement. All property belonging to landlords, gentry and landed nobility alike, was expropriated without compensation. The smallholding peasant thus came to constitute the sole element of the rural class structure. Reform also swept away all customary tenure arrangements, though local dispute settlement, land transaction and mutual aid institutions remained resilient and continue to function to this day.

Land distribution took place among households organized in Peasant Associations (PAs) in each *kebele*. Political power at the local level was restructured, with the PA assuming authority at the *kebele* level, and "progressive" minded officials newly appointed by the Derg replacing the gentry at the level of the *woreda* and above. Membership in the PAs was open to peasants only, and landlords were barred from participation, thus closing off any chances such persons may have had of getting control of the organizations and using them for their own purposes. A Judicial Tribunal consisting of peasant lay 'judges' was also established at the *kebele* level (later at the level of the *woreda*) whose task was to resolve disputes, especially disputes arising from land matters, within peasant communities; this undercut the authority of the judiciary, enabling peasants to deal with their own problems in their own way.

The Derg's reform had a good number of positive elements, and this was why it was initially welcomed by the peasantry, however, it was flawed in several respects and this was to undermine its overall benefits to the peasantry. First, reform had a selective impact, that is, not all peasants benefited equally. For landless peasants the reform provided access to land, for tenants it removed the burden of exploitation by landlords, but small owner-cultivators, which made up a quarter of all rural households, lost some of their land during distribution. Secondly, as was noted above, land holders had restricted rights over their plots, and this had a dampening effect on peasant initiative and entrepreneurship⁵⁰. Thirdly, rights to land was based on residency, i.e. peasants had access to land conditional on continued residence in their *kebele*, absence from which for any length of time except of very short duration would jeopardize one's rights. Reform thus blocked rural out-migration because of peasants' fear of losing their allotments, and this gave rise to growing pressure on the land and the diminution of household plots through fragmentation and sub-division. But the most damaging impact was the insecurity of holding that it gave rise to. The promise of land to all meant that periodic redistribution was unavoidable to accommodate new claimants. In the 1980s, there were three to four redistributions in many rural communities in which those said to hold larger plots were deprived of some of their land to give to others. Reform thus brought with it a dynamic process of *levelling* down.

The new reform was soon followed by a number of new legislations and policy directives. There were several laws to restructure PAs and redefine their tasks and responsibilities in the second half of the 1970s. New laws and directives to launch collectivization, justify grain requisition, promote villagization, and undertake resettlement were issued in quick succession thereafter. The 1980s was thus a decade of increasing institutional instability which created uncertainty and mistrust among the rural population. Due to space limitations we shall not discuss these programs in-depth but will briefly look

50 Dessalegn 1984; 1993a,b.

at collectivization which came to pose a major threat to peasant enterprise and individual rights to land⁵¹.

The initial reform was driven by what may be called radical populism. At this early stage, the overriding concern of the Derg was to break the back of the old order and its supporting pillars, namely the monarchy, the landed classes, the exploitive system of property relations in the rural areas, and what was broadly referred to as "feudalism and underdevelopment". The language of the government at this time was pitched to the "popular masses" with a strong appeal to nationalism and justice to the poor. The ideal society in the countryside was viewed as being made up of self-labouring peasant farmers who had sufficient means (land, livestock and income) for a livelihood based on the rustic values of hard work, honesty and cooperation. But this populist phase was short lived, to be replaced by the doctrinaire ideology of Soviet-style communism accompanied by hard line rural policies including agricultural socialization.

The shift to collectivization was decided upon soon after the radical land reform, with heavy investment in state farms, followed by the push for what were known as peasant producer cooperatives. The government's ambitious plan was that the "transition to socialist agriculture" would be largely completed by the first half of the 1990s, i.e. some fifteen years after the process of collectivization was launched. By then, the socialist agricultural sector was to become dominant, operating over 60 percent of the cultivable land. Decision makers favoured, in particular, producer cooperatives, which were expected to cultivate 50 percent of the farm land in the country in this period, because they were believed to be more efficient and more cost-effective. The government's justification for accelerating collectivization was that it would greatly increase agricultural production and thus promote food security, pave the way for the modernization of farming, particularly the introduction of new technology, and improve the livelihood of the rural people.

⁵¹ For discussion of all these programs, particularly collectivization, see Dessalegn 1993a, b.

All through the 1980s thousands of peasants were forced into hastily organized producer cooperatives, thereby losing their individual rights to land, and state agriculture was encouraged to expand its operations through increased investment. However, both enterprises continued to perform poorly, frequently below the smallholder sector, and to absorb a disproportionate share of state revenue. In the end, collectivization failed to achieve any of the goals expected of it but instead wasted immense resources and remained a cause for resentment and insecurity among individual smallholding peasants. By the close of the 1980s, the drive for collectivization was halted as the government came to realize that the high cost of collectivization was unsustainable, and the program was finally brought to an end in 1990 with the announcement of the Mixed Economy reforms, a dramatic turnaround which was forced on the Derg as much by the failure of the program as the escalation of the war by insurgents against the government. Producer cooperatives were thoroughly dismantled by peasants and individual rights to land restored immediately following the announcement of the new policy.

The radical reforms of the military regime were a success in some respects but a dismal failure in many others. The new measures transformed rural Ethiopia into a society of small, self-labouring peasants whose livelihood became increasingly precarious on account of the dynamics of the reform itself. To promote social equity, reform undermined peasant confidence. The reform restructured the land system but, in doing so and in its practicalities, it made insecurity of tenure an enduring element. The state replaced the landlord as the juridical owner of the land and because of this provided the former greater hegemony over the peasant.

Reforming the Reform: Land Rights and Legislation since 1995

Following the overthrow of the military government in 1991 and the seizure of power by the insurgent forces, united in a coalition of ethnic-based parties called the Ethiopian People's

Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the country was divided into what are called *Killils* (Regions or States) drawn along ethnic lines. The Constitution that was subsequently adopted established a federal political system with the *Killils* as the component elements. The administrative structure of the country now consists of the *Killil*, below which is the Zone (comparable to a province), the *woreda* (district) and the *ke-belle* (sub-district). As part of the devolution of power within the federal framework, the *Killils* were given wide administrative and legislative powers, including the power to issue legislation to administer land and natural resources.

The Federal government's land policy is quite similar to that of the Derg described above and hence the discussion of the details of the current legislations will have to be brief.⁵² There are however a number of differences and several new initiatives which we shall note below. Federal and *Killil* legislations pertaining to land include the Constitution issued in 1995, the federal law of 1997 which has been repealed and replaced by a similar law issued in 2005, and a law on land expropriations and payment of compensation (FDRE 2005b,a). *Killil* legislations on land, the most recent of which were issued in 2002 (by Oromia) and 2004 (Southern *Killil*) have been superseded by the latest Federal law and all *Killils* are now in the process of preparing new ones as a consequence. At present government land policy is enshrined in the Constitution, which promises each adult in the rural areas, who wishes to live by farming, "land sufficient" for his/her livelihood; access to land for rural persons is thus a right. Land is here defined as the property of the people but is administered on their behalf by the state. This principle is reproduced in all *Killil* Constitutions. In effect land is state property, and peasants thus have only use rights over plots they have in their possession which cannot be sold, exchanged or mortgaged⁵³.

52 Some other aspects of the land system and the new initiatives, particularly land registration are discussed in the previous essays

53 The key articles in the Constitution regarding land tenure are: Article 40, sub-articles 3, 4, 6, and 7; and article 52, sub-article (d) (FDRE 1995).

There are several factors that have added to tenure insecurity among landholders. The first is the absence of a clear justice system for settling land disputes. During the imperial regime, the local courts were the only authority (outside traditional institutions) that had the competence to hear cases involving land disputes. The main criticism of these courts at the time was that they were thoroughly corrupt and almost invariably ruled against the poor and in favour of the rich and privileged. The Derg deprived these courts of the power to try land cases and vested such powers in the newly created Judicial Tribunals, which were a part of Peasant Associations and consisted of peasant lay 'judges'. All land matters at the *kebele* level were brought before the Tribunals (Dessalegn 1984). The present government has abolished these Tribunals and established what are called Social Courts – formal state courts at the *kebele* level comprised of official judges. These Courts are empowered to hear land cases. However, land or other disputes which are beyond their competence are frequently referred to the *woreda* courts. To the average peasant, the *woreda* is too far away from his/her locality and taking one's case there is inconvenient, time-consuming and costly. Moreover, peasants do not have much confidence in the Social nor *woreda* courts, and instead prefer to take their cases to customary dispute settlement institutions⁵⁴.

The second factor is the authority given to different government agencies to intervene in land matters. The local Development Agent (DA)⁵⁵, the *kebele* council, and officials from the Offices of Agriculture and of Environment Protection can take decisions that may threaten an individual household's rights and access to land. This has given state officialdom at the local level immense power over the peasant. A recent Federal law (FDRE 2005a) in fact gives local authority additional discretionary power to dispossess peasants of their land. Under this law, the *woreda* administration is empowered to expropriate farm land if it deems the land will be more useful allotted to

⁵⁴ Dessalegn 2004.

⁵⁵ The DA is the government's rural extension agent found in each *kebele*.

a public or private investor, cooperative society or others, or if it is needed for public purposes. Once the landholder is served with an eviction order by the *woreda* he/she has no recourse to appeal and must vacate the land within ninety days. The holder is offered compensation but this is often far below the market price of the property involved.

The third factor is what I call the lack of legislative awareness both by peasants as well as local officials. Copies of legislations and policy documents are rarely provided to the local Development Agent, the *kebele* or *woreda* authorities, and neither are these officials adequately briefed about government decisions. Thus officials that have the closest contact with the peasant farmer interpret the law or government policy not according to what it actually says but what they think it does, and there is often a big gap between one and the other. On the other hand, peasants are equally ignorant of the law and their rights within it, and consequently are powerless to voice their dissent or defend their rights. A fourth factor is the frequent revisions of the law, which as in the case of the Derg has given rise to institutional instability. Frequent changes of the law have created greater uncertainty among peasants who have come to lose faith in the legal system and in government policies⁵⁶

We have noted earlier that the factors that have exacerbated tenure insecurity during the Derg were periodic land redistribution on the one hand, and the fact that land rights were tied to continuous residence in one locality on the other. The latest Federal legislation has not removed the threat of redistribution nor the residency requirement (FDRE 2005b, see Article 9). While the Derg did not, by law, expressly provide for periodic redistribution, this legislation and other Federal policy instruments include provisions that do so though they are hedged with a number of conditionalities. In this respect, the Oromia *Killil's* land law of 2002, which expressly put an end to both periodic redistribution and the residency requirement, is much better and revising it to be in harmony with the

56 For the magnitude of institutional instability in period since the 1970s see Annex in Dessalegn 2004.

new Federal law will be a step backward for peasants in this *Killil*. An improvement on earlier legislation is that holders can now pass on their rights to their heirs freely and without conditions; in some *Killils* the right to inherit was subject to a number of conditions. Land renting is allowed but, as previously, it is subject to conditions, including approval and registration at the local government office. There are several new measures that have been introduced by the latest Federal legislation (FDRE 2005b), and one of these provides for land measurement, topographical mapping and registration as part of a measure of user certification. Another is the requirement that in the event of land reallocations, inheritance and land rentals, the size of the land in question should not fall below the minimum plot size, though what exactly the minimum size should be is not specified. A third is the choice of resettlement and villagization as new program options to promote improved land use and management practices. Land users are still obligated to "use the land properly" and are liable to penalties, including the loss of their rights to the land, in the event of improper use resulting in what the document calls "damage to the land" (FDRE 2005b). In brief, while some improvements have been introduced, the new Federal law has still not adequately addressed the root causes of tenure insecurity hanging over all rights holders.

The government's justification for its land policy is grounded on what may be described as social equity. The Constitution and all other government documents pertaining to land declare that every rural individual has a right to a plot of land sufficient for his/her livelihood and should claim the right in his/her *kebele* when he/she reaches the age of maturity. Moreover, the government argues that private ownership will give rise to peasant dispossession through distress sale or evictions, high concentration of rural property in the hands of a few, in particular in the hands of the urban bourgeoisie, and widespread poverty and landlessness. These arguments are based on unsubstantiated fears, and very little hard evidence is available to support them. There is no evidence in this country or elsewhere to show that in the absence of the restrain-

ing hand of the state peasants will readily sell their land at the first opportunity. Though flawed in many respects, the recent study by the Ethiopian Economic Association found that most peasants were not keen to sell their land if they were given the chance (EEA 2002; see also Dessalegn 1994).

A result of the equity principle is the expectation that state ownership will do away with the problem of landlessness but the reality on the ground is the reverse. Since the initial land reform of the Derg in the mid-1970s, landlessness has become a problem of the young. Young people who were not old enough to benefit from the last redistribution end up landless when they become adults. The main instrument employed to deal with landlessness so far has been periodic redistribution. Other means include the expropriation of landholders who fail to meet the obligations specified in each *Killil's* land legislation, and the distribution of their plots to the landless. A recent measure which has also been employed for the same purpose is the "privatisation" of hillsides. In both Amhara and Tigray *Killils*, degraded hillside have been divided up and distributed to members of the surrounding community. This was originally an environmental rehabilitation measure but officials are now using it as a measure to tackle the problem of landlessness. However, under present circumstances, landlessness is a dynamic problem: each generation that comes of age is landless and demands rights to land. In some localities the end result of accommodating its demands is increasing land fragmentation and the progressive levelling down of holdings. In others these measures do not generate enough land and not all young people receive land.

A third element of the equity principle is the promotion of social equality in rural society. State ownership, it is argued, will ensure that the gap between the rich and the poor is narrowed and that inequalities of wealth and property leading to social antagonism and class conflict will be minimized. True, the existing land system discourages rural differentiation based on land size. As a result of periodic redistribution and other measures imposed by the dictates of the land system, differences in land ownership among households is narrowing down.

Equality of holdings is being achieved in a two-fold process: a) larger holders are losing some of their land through a process of unilateral levelling down; what is taken from them does not lift smaller holders up but goes to benefit some of the landless; b) larger holders are losing some of their land and smaller holders are gaining as a result. The term "large" and "small" holder should be taken in its relative sense: compared to the situation in other African countries, the largest holder in Ethiopia would be a small holder elsewhere in the continent. At any rate, social equality has come at a heavy price, in that the equality that is unfolding in the countryside is equality of poverty.

As we can see from the distribution of holdings in the country, shown in Table 6.1 below, more than a third of households operate what can only be described as micro-holdings, namely 0.5 hectare (*ha.*) or less. The majority, i.e. nearly 56 percent, hold 0.1 to 1.00 *ha.*, and 87 percent operate 2 hectares or less. Medium sized holders, i.e. those farming 2 to 5 *ha.* constitute a little under 12 percent of households, while only one percent may be considered large holders with over 5 *ha.* of land. The distribution of micro-holdings is more severe in the Southern *Killil*, where the figure for those holding 0.1 to 0.5 *ha.* is 56.4 percent, followed by Tigray with 40.5 percent.

Table 6.1: Percentage Distribution of Holdings by Size
(in *ha.*)

<i>Killil</i>	<i>Less 0.1</i>	<i>0.1 - 0.5</i>	<i>0.51- 1.00</i>	<i>1.01- 2.00</i>	<i>2.01- 5.00</i>	<i>5.01-Over</i>
Tigray	7.0	33.5	29.9	21.4	7.6	0.4
Amhara	7.6	22.0	25.8	30.5	13.6	0.5
Oromia	5.9	24.6	25.3	26.2	16.1	1.9
Southern	9.9	46.5	25.4	14.2	3.8	0.2
National	7.6	29.5	25.7	24.3	11.9	1.0

Source: CACC 2003

All farmers in the country except those in the Southern *Killil* are engaged predominantly in the cultivation of cereal crops and an average family would, under normal circumstances,

es, require between 2.5 to 3.5 hectares of good quality land to produce enough food to feed itself for one harvest year. By this yardstick, only about 13 percent of holdings are capable of sustaining their owners, the rest face food shortages on a regular basis. The figures in Table 6.1 show quite clearly the depth of poverty and land hunger in the rural areas. It may be worth noting here that in the circumstances of shrinking land resources and high population pressure, the promise of the right to land given in the law to any citizen in the rural areas can only be described as misguided and counterproductive.

While the existing land system is quite inflexible in some respects, it does allow limited and short-term land transfers, although in some cases these are encumbered by conditionalities. In this regard, the present system is more flexible than the previous one. Land transfer practices are just as complex at present as they were in the past. Currently, the most common forms of short-term land transfer are sharecropping, rentals, land loans, and limited "leases" (Ahmed et al. 2002). Long-term transfers include inheritance and endowments. There are several kinds of endowments, the most common of which is the marriage endowment. Since land cannot be sold, mortgaged or exchanged on long-term bases, these forms of transfer are not part of the land market although there is some evidence to suggest that peasants are engaging in such transfers, including land sales, surreptitiously in some areas (Bruce, Hoben and Dessalegn 1994).

The government has embarked on new measures to try to promote greater tenure security and partly to address the serious food crises that the country continues to face despite increased food aid and new agricultural development programs. One of these measures, land certification and registration, has been discussed in greater detail earlier in this volume.

Despite the radical reforms of the past and the significant changes that have occurred there are also close similarities in the land systems of the pre- and post-Revolution periods. First, in both systems, the state had immense power over landed property: in the past the state was both a landlord in its own right and had a strong say over land formally not under

its control. At present, the state has power over *all* landed property. Secondly, a majority of peasants in the past had only use rights over the land they cultivated and such land was not transferable in any form on a long-term basis except through inheritance by siblings; this is almost identical to the rights peasants have under the present system. In brief, the tenure system in this country over the last fifty years may be described as one in which in one way or another, the state defined or had a decisive say over rights of access to and disposal of rural land. This power became total with the nationalization of land after the Revolution and in the period since then. Under both circumstances, the cultivator remained subordinate, and dependent on public authority for his/her very livelihood.

Moreover, both in the imperial past and at the present time, the land system failed to provide land users *secure rights of tenure* that were robust and not subject to arbitrary revocation by others, including the state. In the past, the tenant, the *rist* holder, as well as the owner cultivator were all subject, in one form or another, to the loss of their holdings or restrictions in their use. As noted above, the problem of the first two categories of cultivators is obvious, but while better off in many ways, the owner cultivator was not free from uncertainty and fear. First, there were a number of powerful landlords who held high positions in government who were notorious for engrossing land by unscrupulous methods. Such landlords often used their authority to expropriate land belonging to owner cultivators with minimal compensation. The courts at the time were so thoroughly corrupt that redress of grievances through the justice system was out of the question for the average cultivator. Secondly, due in part to the fact that there was no cadastral survey, and that only a small portion of the land in the country was measured and registered, there were frequent land disputes especially over plot boundaries but also over inheritance and transfer rights. Such disputes could drag on through the courts for many years and on occasions could cause financial ruin and even family breakups among litigants. Finally, in the past, before Haile Selassie's land tax reforms, the owner-cultivator, known as *gebbar* (literal meaning: tribute

payer), was burdened with many of the same obligations as the tenant, including dues in the form of labor, personal service and duty during military campaigns.

The degree and extent of land insecurity thus varied from one political (and ownership) regime to another, nevertheless it is widely recognized that it was a threat hanging over a majority of peasant cultivators in the imperial period but had become a danger affecting all peasants in the period since then. While before the radical land reform over 50 percent of the farming population was under tenancy and dependent on the landed classes and the state, at present all peasants are "tenants" of the state (though not in the full sense of the word) and all of them suffer a high degree of tenure insecurity. Insecurity of tenure was responsible, in the past as well as today, for the lack of long-term investment on the land and of effective environmental measures, and this, coupled with other factors too numerous to deal with here, continued to aggravate the poverty of rural society.

Yet there are other factors that have a strong bearing on the issues at hand, *viz.* the effect and effectiveness of land reforms. These include state-society power relations and the process of reform legislation itself. The relation between the state and the peasant has always been an unequal one, and reflects, at each particular occasion, the hegemony of the ruling power. Despite differences in a number of important aspects, the three regimes under discussion have many things in common, and may be described as *intrusive* regimes. Each in its own way has been driven by the desire to regulate, manipulate and mobilize rural society for its own ends. As we have seen already, one important weapon in this endeavor has been the control of land resources. The modern state has always made strenuous efforts to intervene in and exercise control over the rural sector, and agrarian change has taken place within this overriding concern. It has narrowed the gap between the public and private sphere, and succeeded in becoming virtually the only active force in rural society, with all other actors merely its shadow. The peasant has thus been left little room for independent initiative and self-actualization.

Over the years, Ethiopian peasants have expressed their dissatisfaction with the existing form of property and power relations in various ways, though unlike Latin America or pre-modern China peasant uprisings have not been part of the country's agrarian history⁵⁷. The massive show of support by the rural population to the new military state for its overthrow of the imperial regime and, later, the proclamation of land reform was a clear statement of peasant alienation from the imperial system which they saw as one based on exploitation, and their acceptance of the present order of things. One is doubtful if the reform would have been successfully implemented or the military state itself survived for long without the active participation of the peasantry in reform implementation and in the struggle against landlord opposition. The Derg lost the support of the peasantry in subsequent years with its unpopular and ruinous rural policies; the result was that the rural population either refused to come to the aid of the state in its hour of need or gave its tacit backing to the insurgent forces fighting against it, which paved the way for the eventual collapse of the Derg. Under the current government millions of peasants expressed discontent with existing policies and practices by casting their vote against the ruling party and in favor of opposition candidates in the national elections of 2005.

The process of legislating change itself that was briefly noted above has a significant bearing on the final outcome and is thus important to examine. All the reforms we have examined, whether conservative, radical or moderate, have been *reforms from above*, relying for the most part on the instrumentality of the law to effect change. They reflect a technocratic approach to social or agrarian transformation. The legislations in question were formulated without consultation or the participation of either the intended beneficiaries or the wider stakeholders. They were implemented in most cases by technocratic and civil servants except in the case of the Derg's land reform of 1975 which was issued under exceptional circumstances. But legislating reform from above is undemocratic and, as is clear

57 See Dessalegn 1996 for a discussion of this.

from the Ethiopian experience, invariably fails to satisfy the intended beneficiaries or to meet its stated objectives. The decision-making process in all the three regimes has been undemocratic, with the power to initiate and shape policy concentrated in a few hands at the top. Laws and policies were prepared by a few technocrats and sometimes, as in the case of the Derg, in complete secrecy. All the political leaders in question viewed participatory decision making as a challenge to their authority and were hostile to any effort to democratize the institutions of policy making (Andargachew 1993; Pausewang et al. 2002). Thus, all through the period under review, the Ethiopian peasant has been the object of reform and a passive recipient of state "beneficence".

Agrarian Social Structure: From the Heterogeneous to the Homogenous

Agriculture is a lonely occupation in this country, because, unlike industry where the final output is the combined product of the management, the technical expert and the laborer, the peasant in contrast is his/her own manager, technician and laborer, and responsible for the totality of the farm product and for marketing it too. This is obviously a consequence in large measure of the existing level of farm technology and the limited nature of the division of labor. The typical Ethiopian peasant farm is a family operation, and while it relies on the division of labor within the family, efficiency depends on combining the whole operation and putting it under one person or family rather than on distributing it among many persons. In this circumstance, other social groups that may exist are *superfluous* to the production process (we may leave out the rural artisan who plays a marginal role in peasant production).

Agrarian social structure here takes on a distinct meaning. It relates first of all to the social classes "surrounding" the peasantry, all of which play no part in the production process but placed demands and imposed obligations on it. In the imperial regime both the landed nobility and the local gentry were such classes. Wolf's point that peasants are defined in terms of

the field of power that surrounds them may be understood in this sense. The only class that may be said to have stood "parallel" to the peasant at this time was the commercial farmer who, like the peasant, was engaged in agricultural production. This incipient class appeared briefly in the last quarter of the regime but was eliminated along with the landed classes following the radical reforms of the Derg. Secondly, the relationship between the peasantry and the classes that surrounded it is one centered on the expropriation of the rural surplus. The rural reforms of the Derg radically restructured rural society leaving the peasant as the only class in it, a change that remains true to this day. In what follows we shall discuss the class structure during Haile Selassie's reign first and then examine the effects of social restructuring following the Revolution and at present.

Heterogeneity: From the 1950s to Early 70s

We have already noted that the dominant classes under the imperial system were the landed nobility and local gentry. The former were typically absentee landlords controlling huge tracts of land along with innumerable tenant farmers predominantly in the southern provinces. It would not be an exaggeration to say that they owed their relative opulence and privileged status due in large measure to the income they derived from their tenancies and, to a limited extent, from their urban real estate. The surplus from the tenant cultivator was quite a substantial income even for the lowly member of the class: tenancy rents frequently were a proportion of the harvest and ranged from one-third to as high as two-thirds. As was noted earlier, there was stiff opposition from the landed interests in the 1960s and early 70s to any proposal to change the system of "share tenancy" (which was the main form of tenancy at the time) into one with fixed rents and to introduce rent control. The lands of the nobility were often managed by stewards but these were scattered in many distant localities and thus neither the landlords nor the stewards had effective input in the production process. Indeed, the landlords rarely visited their possessions and were chiefly interested in the regular flow of the rent from

their tenants without bothering too much what the latter produced and how they produced it. Until the last quarter of imperial rule, few members of the nobility were willing to invest in new enterprises (such as mechanized farms), new ventures or even new crops. In fact, the evidence shows that the nobility in general showed little concern, historically as well as in more modern times, for economic entrepreneurship or technological progress. They were mostly eager to skim off as much of the peasant surplus as quickly as possible, a behavior that may be explained in part by the fact that many of them were not secure in their holdings which they owed to the benefice of office or imperial land grants which could be taken away at any time. Similarly, their tenants were not keen on new farm techniques because improved production would mean increased levels of rent for the landlord. Share tenancy thus had the added disadvantage of discouraging progress in agricultural production and farm technology.

The local gentry, the second important landed class in the agrarian economy, were different in quite a few respects. I have discussed the characteristics of this class elsewhere in this volume and I shall merely add a few points here. Made up for the most part of a diverse mix of local notables, whose possessions were often much less extensive than the nobility, they had closer contact with their tenants and some input in the production process. In sharp contrast to the nobility, local gentry took a more active interest in the operation of their holdings and were quite familiar with farming conditions and the economy of the locality in question. Moreover, some of them took the initiative to invest in farm improvements such as, for example, small-scale irrigation schemes, land rehabilitation measures, and modern cattle ranching. They were more open to new technology if such technology was seen to be economically beneficial to them. Many local notables in the southwest of the country were quick to turn their land into mechanized farms in the latter half of the 1960s when such enterprises were found to be profitable. At the same time, because of their relative proximity to their possessions and knowledge of local conditions, they were liable to be much more exacting and more

exploitive of their tenant farmers.

Both classes were an integral part of the power structure of the imperial regime, serving as important officials in the administrative apparatus from center to periphery. The old administrative structure was cumbersome and bureaucratic, and the twin purpose for which it was originally established, namely maintaining law and order and tax collection, remained important all through the life of the regime. It was from the latter part of the 1950s that the apparatus began to shoulder responsibilities for service delivery.

The country was divided for administrative purposes into provinces, each made up of *awrajas* (sub-provinces), *woredas* (district) and *mikitil woredas* (sub-district); this last unit was abolished in 1973. Each unit was administered by a governor appointed by the emperor, except in the case of two provinces that had special status. I have argued in the essay noted above that governors and senior officials in the *awraja* and below, many of whom carried feudal titles corresponding to their rank in the administration, constituted the local gentry. On the other hand, the post of provincial governor was in many instances occupied by the landed nobility. In contrast, senior offices in central government were filled by what Levine and others have described as the "modern educated elite", or what Bahru calls the "nobility of service" as opposed to the nobility of birth or hereditary aristocracy. The latter did occupy some ministerial and ambassadorial posts, had strong representation in the Senate, the lower house of Parliament, and served as the emperor's advisors in the Crown Council. It may appear from this that the nobility were marginalized at the center where power was concentrated but I concur with Bahru's argument that the distribution of senior posts in central government "should not suggest ... that the hereditary aristocracy had been consigned to complete political oblivion". On the contrary, various aristocratic personalities and members of the royal family together did exercise considerable influence over the emperor and the country's politics (1991: 206; see 201-206). According to my informant noted above, it was prominent figures from the nobility in the Senate who were instrumental in convinc-

ing the emperor to abort the tenancy reform bill in Parliament discussed earlier.

On the other hand, from the standpoint of the lowly peasant, the relative power position of the landed nobility and the so-called modern educated elite was hardly significant. First, the power of the nobility vis-à-vis the peasant was still immense despite Haile Selassie's land tax reforms and the abolition of the *gult* system. Powerful lords of the land continued to expropriate peasants' property at will and to evict tenants arbitrarily even on the eve of the Revolution. Secondly, the educated elite was no less predatory than its hereditary competitor. The term "educated elite" actually hides more than it reveals: it is a "technicist" concept defining a social group on the basis of formal schooling and bureaucratic aspirations rather than property ownership or political ideology. Over the years, this group took on many of the trappings of the landed nobility and was the beneficiary of large tracts of land through imperial grants; the numerous tenants on its estates were just as severely exploited as those of other landlords.

We now turn to the other rural social elements that were part of the agrarian system, especially those that came to play a fairly significant role in the last years of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. Of particular interest were two emergent social groups (or classes-in-information) that were economically active at this time. One was the mechanized farmer and the other what I wish to call the Ethiopian "yeoman". There is relatively more information about the first than the second, but both made a fleeting appearance round about the same time (though the genesis of the latter goes a long way back), only to disappear under the hammer of radical reforms and agrarian socialization in the second half of the 1970s⁵⁸.

Mechanized farmers were a disparate mix of people from many walks of life: they were businessmen, urban professionals, civil servants, local gentry and, later, members of the landed nobility. What drove this group was the promise of quick profits

58 For both groups see references in Essay 2 in this volume. The discussion that follows is also based on same sources.

and enrichment that mechanized farming and the production of export crops appeared to hold at the time. I have discussed commercial agriculture in great detail in the essay noted above and I shall only offer a few summary points here. These were favorable times for mechanized farming. Government development policy placed strong emphasis on agricultural mechanization, offering tax and financial incentives to those who wished to invest on such enterprises. The government itself was the first to embark on the venture, and by the end of the 1960s it was the largest commercial farmer in the country. Many of the major donor agencies were, at least initially, quite enthusiastic about the prospects of mechanization both as a source of foreign earnings as well as a catalyst for the modernization of agriculture. The Stanford Research Institute commissioned by USAID to study Ethiopia's agricultural economy and its prospects in the late 60s recommended the expansion of commercial agriculture and greater investment in agro-industries. There was a strong demand for pulses (especially horse and haricot beans) and sesame seed from the international market at the end of the 1960s and early 70s, and world prices were buoyant as a result. The combination of a favorable policy environment and a robust export market provided good justification for enterprising landlords, small and large alike, to turn to mechanization and to evict their tenants in large numbers for that purpose. In some cases, men (and a few women) who lived off the rent from peasants or who did not have any farming experience became commercial farmers almost overnight. By the beginning of the 70s, mechanization was coming under critical scrutiny, and the enthusiasm of the earlier years was beginning to be replaced with disaffection. The World Bank, which had been a strong advocate of commercial agriculture in the 1960s, became concerned about the inefficiencies of many of the enterprises and saw instead considerable potential in peasant agriculture by the end of the decade. Insisting that land reform was essential for a rapid increase in agricultural productivity, it recommended that policy makers provide strong support to the peasant sector (1973, Vol. I).

There was no love lost between the peasant and the large

modern farmer. To the humble peasant such farmers were "outsiders", and represented a threat and unfair competition, privileged by the state and the dominant classes. Wherever the large farmer appeared there were evictions, or the threat of evictions from the land. The case of the pastoralist groups in the Awash Valley, and the expropriation of their grazing land and water sources in the 1960s and 70s by agro-industry and large farm enterprises is a good example. The large-scale evictions of tenant farmers in Arssi in the same period is another example. The mere presence of a mechanized enterprise in a locality was a cause of considerable insecurity to the surrounding peasantry because many believed that the enterprise would eventually displace them from their land by physical expansion or by setting an example that would persuade their own landlords to turn to mechanization. To many a modern farmer, the peasant farm was an antiquated enterprise, and, he believed the sooner it was replaced with mechanization the better the chances for the transformation of the country's agricultural economy. Indeed, to most such farmers, and the majority of the urban elite as well, modernization of agriculture was unthinkable without mechanization and large-scale farm operations.

What I have called the "Ethiopian yeomen" were farmers of peasant background who were enterprising enough to pursue market-based agriculture often using the ox-drawn plough. They were frequently owner-cultivators, sometimes renting in additional land for such pursuits; occasionally they were tenants who managed to get access to sufficient land to undertake farming for the market. A good percentage of "yeomen" farmers operated land measuring below twenty hectares, but the majority managed from five to ten. In all cases, they were a product of the differentiation of the peasantry in which those who were fortunate enough to be better endowed were willing to try ventures outside subsistence farming. The spread of commercial agriculture in the 1960s opened up considerable opportunities for these farmers. In the Setit Humera and Rift Valley areas, commercial agriculture was undertaken not only with tractors and modern machinery but also with the ox-drawn plough, the latter by enterprising small farmers who

were eager to take advantage of the market opportunities that was opened up. On occasions, a number of these farmers here were able to rent tractors on a group basis for land clearing and ploughing purposes. In order to get access to institutional credit, these small farmers were organized into cooperatives, and a few of the cooperatives were able to get loans from the Agriculture and Industrial Bank, the main institution responsible for credit services to the agricultural sector. According to available data, ox-plough farmers operated some 42 percent of the land under cultivation in the Humera area at the time. While a small percentage of "yeomen" farmers, both here and elsewhere, operated their farms by themselves with family support, many employed hired laborers especially during land preparation, weeding and harvesting.

Another enterprising group that may be included in the "yeomanry" though with slightly different endowments, were small farmers who took up the opportunities opened up by contract farming and outgrowing in the Awash Valley that was attracting large investments for mechanization and agro-industries at this time. The farmers in question were small cultivators from the adjoining highlands that migrated to the Valley, rented irrigated land and produced crops (cotton and sugar, for the most part but also maize, fruit and wheat) which they sold to the large plantations and agro-industries located there. Data from the Awash Valley Authority shows that contract farmers and out-growers cultivated nearly one-third of the irrigated land in the area. Harbeson (1975) suggests that the total population of contract farmers and out-growers in the Valley by the beginning of the 1970s may have reached some 20,000. It is interesting to note that the verdict of most foreign observers and donor agencies in the country was that the Valley was being developed rapidly and intensely by the "most economically advanced agricultural system to be introduced in the country" (Harbeson), and small farmers from the highlands were an important part of the force that was driving this development.

Clearly these two social groups, the modern farmer and the enterprising "yeoman" were a new and dynamic force in the agrarian economy of the country. As I have argued else-

where, of the two, the latter held the greater potential and represented the seeds of agrarian development with much less cost to the nation. The peasant-turned-market-oriented farmer would have managed the land under his control with greater care, would have been more environment friendly, and would have had better rapport with the peasant community in which he may even still be living than the urban-based mechanized farmer. Agrarian change spearheaded by small farmers of the kind that were beginning to emerge at this time would have involved much less peasant evictions, less environmental damage, and less class inequalities. Moreover, such change would have been more acceptable to the rural population than the options provided by mechanization. The small farms operated by the new farmers were not in all respects as efficient as the mechanized ones, though in some areas and in a few crops they were quite competitive. The reason for this was not due to the inherent inferiority of small operations but because of constraints arising from the existing land tenure system, unequal treatment by decision makers, and greater incentives to larger operations.

To round out the discussion I should say a few words about agricultural wage labor during the imperial period. We may start by noting that the agricultural proletariat, properly so called, was hardly visible at this time (and virtually disappeared subsequently, in the post - Revolution period). Despite the growing investment in capitalist farming and agro-industries, and despite considerable landlessness and unemployment in the rural areas, the rural proletariat - that is, the class of people dependent for their livelihood on agricultural wage labor - was quite miniscule. The one area where large numbers of long-term farm laborers were needed was in the plantations and the agro-industries in the Awash Valley, and Harbeson has estimated that in the early 70s about 75, 000 people benefited from seasonal work while some 50,000 were employed as permanent labor there. This latter figure must be taken with caution as it includes managerial, technical and other white-collar workers as well. Nevertheless, for all practical purposes that was the extent of the agricultural proletariat in the country.

On the other hand, there was a large population of high-land peasants that every year flocked to the large mechanized farms and agro-industrial enterprises in the Awash Valley, Setit Humera, the Rift Valley and other locations in search of seasonal employment. If we add to this the thousands of poor peasants that traveled to the coffee growing areas to looking for work during the harvest season, the number of seasonal workers could add up to a quarter of a million annually. The work in question was for a month or two, and all but a few returned to their home areas once it was over, expecting to return a year later for a similar stint. Sometimes some peasants stayed longer with their seasonal jobs, and occasionally a few might settle there because they had found a chance to get access to farmland. Whatever the case, few peasants were willing to remain as agricultural laborers longer than necessary, and many returned to their homes as soon as they thought they had earned enough. Several reasons may be offered to explain why the rise of the rural proletariat was thwarted. One is the strength of the pre-capitalist agrarian ethos holding peasants to the land. Landlessness caused hardship on individuals and families but it was often considered a temporary misfortune and that in time there would be land available for farming in one form or another (inheritance, endowment, tenancy, borrowing, etc.). On the other hand, agricultural wage labor was insecure for all but the few with skills in demand: the capitalist sector was too undeveloped to be an attractive source of income and to entice peasants out of farming. Another is that there was no compelling pressure for cash income for peasant households above and beyond what was needed to meet their annual tax obligations; hence the urge for wage employment was not overwhelming. One is reminded here of the draconian measures employed by colonial authorities in Africa to force peasants to seek employment in white-owned farms or the modern sector. No such compulsion was attempted by Ethiopian authorities.

Homogeneity: The Derg Period and After

As was noted above, the class structure of rural Ethiopia was profoundly altered by the land reform of 1975 and by subsequent legislations and radical programs pursued by the Derg. The outcome of these measures was the complete expropriation of the estates of the landed classes, the nationalization of landed property, the transformation of all rights of holdings of peasant cultivators into use rights, and the abolition of private ownership in land. The immediate impact of agrarian change was to remove all classes from the countryside, except the laboring peasant, and to create a homogenous social structure consisting only of a mass of poverty-stricken micro-holders. This structure is still with us today, although there are some changes taking place at present. At one stroke, land reform eliminated the power and privilege of the landed classes along with some members of these classes themselves. Through summary executions, assassinations, imprisonment, and involuntary exile, the Derg purged the country of landlordism and swept away an agrarian system built over centuries on the bleeding backs of peasants and at immense social, political and environmental cost to the country. I have discussed the unsuccessful resistance of some landed elements to the Derg's reforms earlier in this work, but by and large, the landed classes, particularly the nobility, the most feared class at the time, were eliminated without posing any serious threat to the new authorities. It is my opinion that the complete and irreversible defeat of landlordism was the greatest achievement of the military dictatorship.

Both emergent classes, the commercial farmer and the "yeoman", were also victims of the radical reforms of the Derg in the 1970s. This was perhaps one of the worst legacies of the Derg. All mechanized farms were confiscated by the new government, of which some were distributed to the surrounding peasantry but most, particularly the larger ones, were turned into state farms. Land reform destroyed the inchoate "yeomanry" reducing the farmers to the level of small peasants with little opportunity for employing their enterprising skills. Periodic redistribution and the ban on the renting of land and the

hiring of labor, on the one hand, and, on the other, grain requisitioning, forced villagization and cooperativization, which were in force all through the Derg period but which have now been abandoned, ensured that *class* differentiation emerging from within the peasantry would be a thing of the past.

At present, as a result of pervasive tenure insecurity and a host of damaging rural policies pursued by both the Derg and the present government, the overwhelming majority of the peasant population is sunk in grinding poverty. As I have argued elsewhere, the rural economy has undergone a shift towards what I have called micro-agriculture in the last three decades (Dessalegn 2003). Today the peasant farm is growing smaller, producing less, and increasingly losing its fertility. The average household has fewer farm assets and is much more vulnerable. Matters have been made worse by high rates of population growth and severe demographic pressure on the land leading to what one might call the "saturation of rural space".

On the other hand, since the policy shift initiated under the present government in the mid-1990s, large-scale commercial agriculture is attempting to make a comeback, however, conditions today are much more difficult, and world commodity markets less open to Third World countries than they were four decades ago. Similarly, due to the relatively greater flexibility of the land system at present, the chances for improvements in income and asset holding for enterprising elements among the peasantry is much greater, and if the opportunities continue to be provided, those with greater initiative and resourcefulness may gradually evolve to be the new "yeomen" of the rural world. As of now, however, there is an overwhelming degree of social uniformity in the countryside, and we will have to wait and see whether the process of social differentiation within the peasantry becomes firmly established.

There are two forms of rural differentiation that are pertinent here. The first may be described as income or *asset* differentiation, which consists of unequal status based on differences in income, assets and savings. In many instances this is basically nothing more than "wealth ranking". The household that owns a few more cattle, or is endowed with a little more land or

labor, brings home a bigger harvest, and receives a little more annual income than the neighboring household, all due to fortuitous circumstances, is considered better-off or even rich. On these criteria, one may distinguish between the poor and non-poor, or identify gradations of inequality in the form of the poor, the middle and the rich peasant. Such gradations are to be found in most rural communities. Landlessness is a growing problem and the landless must be included in the category of the poor. One of the original goals of the land reform was to solve the problem of landlessness, and the current government continues to argue in favor of state ownership of land because it believes this will address the problem. However, landlessness refuses to disappear.

Class differentiation on the other hand, which arises from differences in productive techniques, such as for example the use of better technology, the hiring of labor, and production for the market, is of critical importance. Class differentiation often subsumes economic differentiation but is qualitatively different from it. Both the Derg and post-Derg periods were either not stable enough or have had a short-life span for significant class differentiation to emerge. I believe that under our conditions the emergence of a new "yeoman" class within the peasantry is a welcome development for the reasons given in the preceding pages. I am not wholly convinced with the argument of the Neo-Marxists of the 1970s and '80s that rural class differentiation in Africa is necessarily evil (see Goodman and Redcliff 1981). That argument is based on a superficial understanding of the reality of rural livelihoods, especially, as McCann has noted, of the day-to-day and season-to-season adjustments of peasants to economic, environmental and political constraints. It is based on a tendentious reading of the facts, and African peasantries have been used as a proxy for criticism of world capitalism or of the development of capitalist agriculture. Robert Brenner, in his otherwise stimulating analysis of agrarian class structure pays scant attention to the differentiation of the English peasantry, the rise of the yeomanry and capitalist tenant farmers, for which he was justifiably criticized. Croot and Parker, one of his critics, show that the key differ-

ence between England and France in the pre-modern period, and the reason why agrarian development took place in the former much earlier than in the latter was that differentiation within the peasantry in England gave rise to capitalist oriented farmers (the yeomen and tenant farmers), while in France the absence of such differentiation, and the depression of the peasantry "into a uniform, poverty-stricken mass whose holdings grew ever smaller" contributed to agricultural stagnation (Ashton and Philpin 1985:86). It is not far fetched to say that the condition of the French peasantry at the time is quite similar in this respect to that of Ethiopian peasants today.

I should note here that peasants themselves do not disapprove of social differentiation and inequality, and this is expressed in various forms in popular culture. In parts of Wollo where I did my fieldwork, peasants often say in response to questions about inequality: "look at our hands, are our fingers equal?" Inequality arising from specialization, innate ability or honest effort is considered natural. This form of inequality does not carry with it the notion of unequal power, of domination and subordination.

Hegemonic State, Subordinate Peasant

The relation between the state and the peasant – the subject to which we now turn – has always been an unequal one, and reflects, at each particular occasion, the hegemony of the ruling power. Despite differences in a number of important aspects, the three regimes under discussion have many things in common, and may be described as *intrusive* regimes. Each in its own way has been driven by the desire to regulate, manipulate and mobilize rural society. As we have seen already, one important weapon in this endeavor has been the control of landed property. The modern state has always made strenuous efforts to intervene in and exercise control over the rural sector, and agrarian change has taken place within this overriding concern. In its practical aspects, state intervention has meant shouldering an increasingly wider responsibility not just in the sphere of governance but also in areas directly associated with

household livelihood endeavors. Over the years, the state has narrowed the gap between the public and private sphere, and succeeded in becoming virtually the only active force in rural society, with all other actors merely its shadow. The peasant has thus been left little room for independent initiative and self-actualization.

Moreover, the attitude of public agents towards the farm population has been heavily paternalistic, and decisions passed down to the rural areas from above are expected to be received without question. The spirit of "statism", if I may call it that (i.e., the assumption that the government knows what is best for the country and for each citizen), is pervasive among all public employees. Thus the tradition of development management in the last fifty years has had no place for dialogue, consultation or partnership.

I shall examine state-peasant relations by looking at the structure of rural governance, the pattern of surplus extraction, and the approach to development management employed by each of the three regimes.

Governing Rural Communities

From the 1940s, the imperial regime employed a dual system of rural administration for most of the years it was in power. A modern albeit somewhat cumbersome system with salaried employees filling essential posts was in place from the province down to the *woreda*. Below the *woreda* was a traditional system based not on full-time salaried employees but on local agents who were given authority to carry out a number of public duties. These agents were granted land for their service but also often benefited from informal forms of payment, services or favors provided by peasants in the community. Such peasant dues were not, as it were, written into their contracts but the practice was widely accepted as the spoils of office and tacitly approved by the government. The selection of local officials was frequently the duty of the *woreda* governor but higher authorities such as the *awraja* governor were responsible for formally appointing them, unless the post was a hereditary, one passed

on from father to son. This was frequently the case with the offices of some of the local officials discussed below, including that of the *balabat* (local notable), which was important in the south of the country.

The structure of administration up to the *woreda* was similar in many respects throughout the country. A hierarchy of public officials, of which the senior ones were all appointed by the emperor, was responsible for administration which until perhaps the latter part of the 1960s had a much more limited meaning than it assumed in later years. Below the *woreda*, however, the system differed from one area to another in detail and in the local personnel recruited as government agents. The local governance structure in Wollo province, for instance, discussed in earlier in this work, was in many ways different from that in Arssi, discussed in Lexander (1970). Many times, the differences had to do with the hereditary offices in place and the entitlements that went with them⁵⁹. Thus, the *balabat* in Arssi, a hereditary official, was responsible for almost all administrative duties in a given locality though he was assisted by a number of lesser officials; he had no counterpart in Wollo. On the other hand, the basic tasks of administration in all areas at this level were tax collection, keeping the peace, community security, and adjudication. The *chiqashum*, who was responsible in the main for tax collection, was ubiquitous in most parts of the country, however, in some communities he also combined other duties, including keeping the peace, apprehending criminals and sometimes adjudication. The police force did not extend its authority below the *woreda*, and, even at the *woreda* the force consisted of no more than one or two officers. Law enforcement at the local level was thus entrusted to what may be described as the rural militia or *nech lebash* (see above), later incorporated into the Territorial Army. The militia was responsible for apprehending criminals, pursuing rebels and dangerous lawbreakers and acting as a security force in the rural areas. The judicial system at this level was headed by the

59 For a discussion of the offices *balabat*, *chiqashum* and others see Markakis, ch. 12. Markakis gives a positive picture of the *chiqashum* and does not discuss the *asbia dagna*.

atbia dagna (local judge), who held court, heard cases brought before it, and passed judgment on them. He was frequently assigned to the post by the *woreda* court.

Not being salaried, all these officials lived off the land, both literally and figuratively. The *chiqashum*, whether a beneficiary of land grants or not, was often allowed to retain for his services a small percentage of the tax he collected (often one or two percent, depending on local custom), passing on the rest to the central treasury. The *atbia dagna* was also paid from the proceeds of his office: he could retain half or more of the court fees for his services. The emolument of members of the rural militia was the grant of land they had received; this they could pass on to their heirs so long as the latter continued serving in the militia. These individuals, or others in the service of the imperial state like them, formed the power structure at the level below the *woreda*. All of them were landowners in one form or another, though the lower the official status the smaller the holding, and all had tenants working their land. A similar power structure was in place at the *woreda* and higher levels of administration: all officials, even including lowly ones had landed interests, many through imperial land grants. Obviously, the hierarchy of authority structures extending from the local to the *woreda* and beyond served the interests of the landed classes. While law and order and adjudication were tasks of benefit to all, the governance system also ensured that customary norms and practices subordinating the peasant to the landlord and to public officialdom were respected and observed. The system did not allow any collective expression of grievances nor a public voice to be heard, and outside faith-based institutions and burial societies no other organizations were tolerated. The land factor was thus a critical factor in the local power structure. It is worth noting here that when the emperor issued a special order allowing grantees to convert their grants to freehold in the 1960s, it was only a portion and not the whole of the land that was covered by the order.

Post-imperial local governance was significantly different in many ways, with the state coming to play a more intrusive role than ever before. Revolutionary change brought with

it a new and potent instrument, the art of political organization and mass mobilization, neither of which Haile Selassie's government was willing to consider nor able to undertake. The increased organizational ability of both the Derg and its successor gave them a greater capacity to regular and manipulate rural society. The Party and its allied organizations (the Peasant Association, the so-called mass organizations, the kebele structure, etc), which extended down to the level of the farm community (and at present almost to the individual household), gave both regimes an unprecedented power of intervention in the lives of rural people.

When land reform removed the propertied classes from the countryside, following the Revolution, it did so, as we have seen, by taking away their property and dislodging them from positions of power in the administrative structure extending down to the local community. The imperial system of rural governance and the power structure based on land was thus completely dismantled. The reform set ten hectares as the maximum limit a rural resident was allowed to own, and all land above this limit was confiscated without compensation and distributed to others. In the implementation of the reform, all persons whose land had been confiscated, including those who had lost even a few hectares were excluded from joining the Peasant Associations or holding office in the new local administration that was being reconstructed. This effectively closed off any chances the *chiqashum*, the *atbia dagna*, the rural militia, the *balabat*, or other officials from the old apparatus of administration might have had of making a comeback. In the unsettled circumstances following the land reform, building a new administrative structure and replacing the old landed bureaucracy from the province down to the *woreda* was no easy task but there was no other alternative. I have discussed some of the measures taken by the Derg to do just that the third essay in this volume. Below the *woreda*, the Peasant Association (PA) was made responsible for local administration, which, as before, involved collecting taxes, law and order, public security and adjudication. The PA initially was meant to be a self-governing organization of peasants responsible for promoting and

defending their interests, but it later turned into an extension of the state apparatus. The basic unit of the Peasant Association was at the *kebele* level, and while a hierarchy of PAs was organized right up to the national level later, it was the PA at the *kebele* that played the most important role in rural governance.

The Derg was able to extend the intrusive powers of the state far more than its predecessor, partly because there were more rural roads now than before, and partly because the PA and other mass organizations set up by it in the rural areas were more effective instruments than the disparate semi-public agents that served the imperial regime. Moreover, the Derg had one other critical institution at its service that the old regime lacked and that was the centralized political party set up along Leninist principles which was formed in the mid-1980s. In a short time, the party replaced the administrative apparatus in the initiation, implementation and monitoring of government policy at all levels. Party membership was extended to the leaders of the PAs and other rural mass organizations set up by the government, thus ensuring compliance and obedience, on the one hand, and enabling the state to continue to extend its power and influence on the other. Another important instrument for power project was the rural agent. The extent to which the bureaucracy of control had expanded is revealed by the great increase in the number of rural agents in the Derg and post-Derg periods. During the imperial regime these agents were known as extension agents and their duties were strictly restricted to agricultural. There were relatively few in number and mainly to be found in localities that were accessible by road transport. In the latter two periods they came to be known as development agents (DAs) and were made responsible for multiple tasks. The number of agents was greatly expanded during the Derg - there was one DA for every three to five PAs - and at present the number has increased further. The DA during the Derg was most likely to be a party member was involved not only in agricultural duties but in implementing many of the Derg's unpopular policies such as cooperativization, villagization and resettlement. He also had a hand in ensuring peasants delivered

their grain quotas, paid their "contributions", and was involved in the forced recruitment of peasant into the army.

The PA became, sometimes reluctantly, an important partner in the implementation of all the Derg's rural policies most of which were silently but bitterly resented by the peasant population⁶⁰. Many rural communities undertook more than one round of land redistribution, and while in many cases the initiative came from the local party activists, the PA was closely involved in the implementation. Grain requisitioning was a measure which aroused strong peasant discontent but it was actively pursued by the government with the reluctant backing of the PA all through the 1980s, until it was abolished by the policy of the Mixed Economy announced by Mengistu Haile Mariam on the eve of his government's downfall. The policy required all rural households to deliver to the government purchasing agency a quota of grain at prices below those offered in the open market. Other unpopular measures in which the PA was implicated were cooperativization, villagization, resettlement, and the recruitment of young peasants to be sent to the ever-expanding war front, all undertaken largely without the consent of the population concerned. There were also extra-legal financial obligations imposed on households that the PA was called upon to collect (more on this further down).

In the end, the land reform and the dismantling of the structure of rural administration that was meant to free the peasant from exploitation turned out to be an instrument for a new form of peasant subordination. Here was an opportunity that was squandered for the greater interest of the state: if the PA had been allowed to evolve in the way it was initially envisaged, it would have provided the peasant an independent voice, and an important instrument for self-activation. Instead, the organization became an instrument of the state, and, in the process, turned against the peasant community itself. Having abolished landlordism, the state refused to allow the peasantry to stand on its own feet and assert its autonomy. Many of the

60 For an extended discussion of the Derg's rural policies see Dessalegn 1993a,b.

rural policies that had made the government unpopular among the peasantry were reversed or suspended in 1990 but this was too late to save the Derg from defeat by the insurgent forces that were knocking at the gates at the time (Dessaiegn 1994). The Mixed Economy reforms announced in March 1990 consisted of the liberalization of the grain trade (and the end of grain requisitioning), the suspension of the drive for agricultural socialization, and the freedom of choice of peasants in cooperatives, resettlement and villagization programs to either opt out or remain in them. Immediately after the announcement of the reforms, producers cooperatives all over the country, numbering close to four thousand, collapsed, and hundreds of thousands of peasants abandoned resettlement and the villagization schemes that they had been driven into against their will in the first place (Dessaiegn 1993b).

There are some similarities and many differences between the Derg and the current government. The PA as an association of peasants is now moribund, and the *kebele* administration has become the unit of state authority below the *woreda*. Below the *kebele* is what was known earlier as *mengistawi boudin*, and as the *limat bouden* now, a sub-unit of the *kebele* that acts as a channel of communication and mobilization for a given number of households; the number of such households varied from 35 to 50 depending on the locality. The new government has thus extended the power and influence of the state even further than the Derg. Like the Derg, this influence is maintained through the agency of the ruling party in each *Killil* which has extended membership to peasants and peasant leaders throughout the rural areas. The *kebele* is managed by an elected council but the elections have so far been stage managed and peasants have not been given a meaningful choice (Meheret 2002). All the *Killils* have, in practice, adopted a one-party system and it does not appear that they will allow other parties to seriously challenge this one-party dominance soon. Indeed, until recently, even puny opposition parties were chased out of the *Killils*, and the private press was not allowed to distribute its papers there. I have discussed the details of the governance system in the rural areas under the present govern-

ment in the preceding two essays, and there is no need to go over the same ground here. There is as yet no independent organization representing the interests of peasants and, as before, the rural voice continues to be silent. Thus the state confronts the individual peasant directly and without mediation. Moreover, thanks to the growth of poverty and destitution, the constant threat of mass starvation and pandemics, the peasant is cowed and submissive. Indeed, food shortages and the threat of famine have further inflated the power of the state in the eyes of the peasant.

The Rural Surplus

The rural cultivator has always been known to be poor, and government officials, landowners, the urban literati were all aware that there was very little wealth being accumulated in the countryside, yet there has been a long and persistent effort by the dominant classes as well as successive governments to siphon off as much of the peasant "surplus" as possible, by fair means or foul. Peasants were burdened not only with a growing number of higher taxes but also a wide variety of extra-legal financial, labor and service obligations to the state, to the landed classes and to religious organizations during imperial rule. The need for more income on the part of the landed classes and the state was met by squeezing the peasant just a little bit more. The end of landlordism and imperial rule should have led to the easing of the burden on the peasant but on the contrary, as we shall see further down, the new order introduced new burdens and new forms of surplus extraction.

Under the imperial regime, the main source of government revenue originating from the rural sector was the variety of taxes that landowners and cultivators were expected to pay annually. As noted above, most landlords passed the taxes they were supposed to pay on to their tenants. The need for increased revenue prompted the government to issue new tax legislations affecting the rural sector, and the major ones in force in the 1960s included the land tax, first issued in 1944 but amended several times; the education tax issued in 1947; cattle tax

(1954); salt tax (1955); health tax (1959); and the income tax, first legislated in 1961 and amended in 1967, which for the first time introduced a tax on income from agricultural activities. It was the 1967 income tax that sparked the rural unrest discussed in Essay 3 above. Many of the individual taxes were relatively small but their cumulative effect was burdensome to the average smallholder. Many were the occasions when peasants appealed to the authorities, especially to the emperor if he happened to visit the rural areas, for tax relief.

Rent and a variety of "extra-contractual" obligations (such as labor, "gifts") were some of the main payments tenants had to provide their landlords. While all tenants were expected to pay rent, the variety of additional obligations varied from one locality to another. As we saw earlier, Haile Selassie's reforms succeeded in doing away with some of the more onerous burdens imposed on tenants, nevertheless, as the tenantry were always in an inferior bargaining position, many landlords continued to impose extra-contractual obligations at will. The law was liberal to landlords in terms of the rate of rent they could impose, the most common ones ranging from one-third to one-half of the harvest. The system discouraged tenants from investing on the land and improving their production since the more they produced the more rent they paid to the landlord. *In fact, it was not uncommon for landlords to increase the rate of rent if they believed the land had become more productive.* Moreover, as noted above, tenants often shouldered taxes that legally should have been the responsibility of the landowner. Of the taxes listed above, only income tax was, by law, payable by land operators including tenants, whereas land, education and health taxes were imposed on the land and hence payable by the landlord. Frequently, however, many tenants ended up having to pay all these taxes in one form or another.

The Derg streamlined the rural tax structure and reduced the tax burden on all land users. Smallholders were to pay a land use fee and agricultural income tax only. Since tenancy was abolished, peasants no longer had to hand over part of their surplus to the landlord. The immediate effect of land reform and other rural policies was thus to increase peasants' dis-

posable income. However, these positive gains were soon nullified by a host of measures imposing a wide range of exactions that subsequently came to embitter peasants against the Derg. Some of the main forms of the rural levy, as I call the combination of non-tax exactions, consisted of the following: grain requisitioning involving financial loss to peasant producers; "voluntary contributions" imposed on almost all peasants for a variety of causes; mass mobilization for work on public projects without pay; and forced recruitment of young peasants for the war effort (Dessalegn 1993b). The rural levy consisted, by and large, of extra-legal measures imposed from above; the exception being grain requisitioning, which was given a legal framework through the legislation establishing the AMC.

Grain requisitioning was an onerous measure which required each peasant household to hand over a quota of grain to the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC), a state purchasing agency, at prices well below those of the market. Peasants had to deliver their quota each season whether they had a harvest or not. AMC, for example, refused to relieve peasants of their obligations when they were hard hit by famine in the mid-1980s. Moreover, the government's attempt to regulate the grain market at this time ended up in distorting it much to the disadvantage of rural producers. Grain requisitioning was justified on the grounds that it would hold down food prices for urban consumers, and do away with the private grain trade, which was considered exploitive. In the end, neither of these objectives was achieved.

The second type of rural levy consisted of "voluntary contributions" imposed for a host of causes: contributions were collected for famine relief, for rehabilitation of war victims, for national defence, for the Motherland, and similar other purposes. These were obligations imposed through the instrumentality of the Peasant Association on a hard pressed population. A third type was mass mobilization of peasants to work on public projects without pay. These consisted of local infrastructure, afforestation schemes, and rural roads, but since they were undertaken with forced labour and often poorly planned, they were of little use to the communities concerned.

Later, with the greater availability of food aid, peasants were employed on large-scale environmental rehabilitation programs on food-for-work schemes. Finally, thousands of young peasants were pressed into military service in the 1980s when the Derg was losing the war against insurgents in the north of the country. To many rural households, this was a loss of labour power. The peasant militia that was thus raised was practically unpaid, poorly trained and equipped, and was not willing to fight a war that it did not quite understand and for a regime that had become increasingly exploitive.

The tax on peasants now consists of single payment establishment on the basis of the size of a household's land. There are three categories: small, medium and large holders each of which pays a graduate tax annually. The rural levy is still part of rural policy at present, though the demands are not as heavy as formerly. There are still so-called voluntary contributions, mass mobilizations for community work without pay, and recruitment of peasant youth for the war effort at the close of the 1990s. The labor mobilizations under the current government have become much more regular and persistent than in the past. In many communities in Tigray and Amhara, for example, peasants are expected to work one day a week, without pay, on community projects on a regular basis, and a household that fails to comply could be liable to punishment. Thousands of peasants were recruited into the army during the boarder conflict with Eritrea, but all the evidence suggests that there was less coercion and recruits were paid a regular salary which was not the case during the Derg.

It is thus evident that under all three regimes, a substantial portion of the rural surplus was siphoned off in the form of taxes and legal and extra-legal exactions. While accurate data are not available, I estimate that under the imperial regime, many peasants may have lost as much as 60 percent of their income in the form rent, taxes and other obligations, while the comparable figure under the Derg would range, according to an estimate I made in an earlier work (Dessalegn 1993b), from one-third to one half. I am unable to make a similar estimate for the present time but the figure is likely to be high though

somewhat less than during the previous two regimes. Clearly then, peasants had very little income left to invest on their farm enterprise, and this explains in part the reason why per capita food production has been declining since the 1950s. Moreover, many studies indicate that in the last three decades rural poverty has been growing steadily, and the average peasant family today is capable of feeding itself from its own farm operations only for six to eight months of the year. In a study focusing on the Derg period, Eshetu (1990) notes that what was returned to the rural sector in the form of state investments was much less than what was taken out of it, and what the sector needed in order to accelerate development.

Development Management

Here we are concerned with the broad conceptual framework that has determined the management of rural development in this country in the period under discussion, rather the implementation and management individual rural program. The *development narrative*, if I may call it that, has obviously changed considerably in terms of program content, strategies and priorities over the years but its core conceptual roots still remain the same. It is these core elements that I shall focus on in this section since some of the other aspects have been examined in the preceding essays.

The first point of note is that the development narrative of the past fifty years has been derivative, with its fundamental conceptual framework defined by external influences. A country's dependency should be measured not just by the material resources it relies on from outside but also the intellectual resources it borrows to shape its thinking and determine its choice of priorities, and from this perspective, Ethiopia's dependency on outside sources in these years has been almost total. From the very beginning, rural development has been largely donor-driven, and, while for a decade or so during the Derg, Soviet bloc influence was predominant, it has been Western donors which have been the determining force for the greater part of the period in question. In fact, the influence of the U.S and

the World Bank in these years has overshadowed those of other countries, and this has coloured the development narrative making it less broad in scope than it would have been under different circumstances. Moreover – and this is the obverse side of the picture – intellectual dependency placed the external voice on such a high pedestal that internal voices were discouraged or stifled, and, at the level of rural life, local knowledge was regarded with low esteem. The “peasant is backward”, a common refrain today as well as in the past among government agents, development practitioners, the urban elite (and not infrequently echoed by sons and daughters of peasants who managed to leave the rural world for life in the towns), expressed the low regard with which local farming practices were held. In the 1980s, the Derg’s rural agents would frequently inform their peasant listeners during rural gatherings that the political and class consciousness of the peasantry is low – a reflection of peasant prejudice expressed in the language of the day.

As the discussion in Essay 2 in this volume shows, “modernization” was the dominant paradigm in rural development in the 1950s and a good part of the 1960s. The strong support provided to large-scale mechanized agriculture in the first two imperial Plans reflected the uncritical acceptance of the assumptions of the modernization approach by policy planners at the time. The hoped-for entry of the country into the modern age riding on the back of the tractor was however a chimera, but even before policy makers had realized the error of their ways, there was a paradigm shift within the donor community away from mechanization towards what was called integrated development. This was a belated recognition of the potential of smallholder production, but in the absence significant institutional reforms, particularly land reform, the new approach produced little impact in terms of improvements in peasant income and livelihoods. The Derg, on the other hand, pursued a development strategy largely copied from the experiences of Soviet bloc countries. Land reform was soon followed by agricultural collectivization, which consisted of peasants enticed, cajoled or threatened into what were called producers co-operatives, managed along Stalinist-communist lines. In addition,

many of the mechanized farms that were expropriated at the time of the land reform were turned into state farms, which by the late 1980s had been expanded considerably. There were also peasant service co-operatives, which resembled what in other countries are called marketing co-operatives, organized at the level of PAs and in which peasants were involved without their consent. It is now commonly accepted that collectivization closed off the opportunities opened up by the initial land reform for improvements in agriculture and peasant income. Collectivization, together with resettlement and villagization that were pursued jointly, were disastrous failures; they were responsible for aggravating the decline of agriculture, and souring the relations between state and peasantry (Dessalegn 1993b).

The present government has maintained the same tradition of reliance on external influences. Its first act when it came to power was to accept the IMF-World Bank's structural adjustment program (SAP) that required it to put in place trade liberalization, privatization and currency devaluation policies; moreover SAP also require an end to fertilizer subsidies which the Derg had earlier promoted. The liberalization of the agricultural sector had already been initiated by the Derg's Mixed Economic policy, and the new regime went ahead to implement the other policy measures required by SAP in the mid-1990s. By the beginning of the new millennium, however, SAP had given place to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Program (PRSP) which was coupled together with a debt cancellation scheme through the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. The government's first PRSP strategy document, called SDPRP, submitted to the Bretton Woods institutions and other donors was approved in 2003, a second one, called PASDEP, was finalized in 2006, and these now officially constitute the main component of its rural development strategy (MOFED 2002, 2006). It is too early to assess the full impact of either SAP or PRSP on the agricultural economy, however, initial indications are that some modest successes have been made, some essential infrastructure has been constructed and access to basic services such as health and education are im-

proving for many rural communities. On the other hand, the threat of hunger and starvation is still present, and despite the safety net program supported by donor countries, chronic food insecurity still brings hardships and suffering to millions of households.

The second major characteristic of the development narrative is that it was strongly coloured by what I wish to call *technicist* assumptions. The technicist narrative goes something like this: there are scientific truths validated in practice in the developed countries, and thus development consists of the transfer of these truths (or skills and techniques) to the population concerned. *It is the task of the expert to effect this transfer*, and development will be assured if these truths are properly put into practice. The recipients – the peasant and the poor in the countryside – are assumed to be ignorant and their view rarely sought; they are instead expected to be passive consumers of what is offered by the expert, who in the rural areas appears as the extension or development agent, the government scientist, the agriculturalist, conservationist, etc.. This has been the context in which rural development programs have been framed, implemented and monitored in this country for the last fifty years. This view reinforces the paternalist attitude that is deeply ingrained in state officialdom, from the highest to the lowest, and that infects the relation between the “expert” and the peasant. There is a profound fallacy in the technicist narrative. To begin with, *there are no universal truths of development* and in fact each social experience is unique and complex. True, one can gain valuable lessons from other experiences, but if properly acquired such lessons provide a greater understanding of the reality of the local condition; one cannot, in other words, pick ideas, programs or “truths” off the shelf and try to employ them elsewhere. Secondly, development is not just a transfer of knowledge but a transformation of power and class relations, and the technicist narrative serves to disguise what is a political and class question into a technical one. Thirdly, the assumption that the expert is the active force and the recipient a passive consumer helps to perpetuate the domination of the latter by the former, of the peasant by the state. Thirdly, if de-

velopment is the transformation of a given social reality, then the people who live in that reality must be expected to have a deep understanding of it and hence as much knowledge as and, in some occasions, more knowledge than the expert. Hence, development must be seen as a joint enterprise in which the people concerned have as much role as the expert in the transformation of their own reality. The belated attempt to give recognition to the value of local knowledge that is beginning to appear in official documents at present is a welcome break from the past, but at the moment such recognition has not been translated into practical effort.

At the farm level, development management has mostly been a one-way traffic for a long time. There is no dialogue between the government expert and the peasant: the two are not partners in a common endeavour, rather there is a kind of teacher-student relationship in which the expert tells the peasant what to do and how to do it. In many cases, new extension programs, farm practices or new technologies are imposed on a reluctant or bewildered peasantry. It is not common practice for government agents to convince peasants of the soundness of new ideas through patient explanation and successful practice. Agents rarely wish to know what relevant local knowledge is available, nor are they keen to adapt new ideas to local conditions using local know-how. For instance, during the Derg, the extensive environmental rehabilitation program that cost immense resources and was undertaken throughout the country relied exclusively on imported conservation technology; local conservation knowledge, which in many instances was quite effective and of course much less costly, was completely ignored (Yeraswork 1995). Due in part to this, the program was a colossal failure. Under the present government, the introduction of the new extension package of fertilizer and improved seeds in the 1990s was carried out by government agents using strong-arm methods. Examples of such undemocratic management methods are too numerous to list here.

On the other hand, current development policy has come to recognize the importance of employing a participatory approach in program implementation and management,

but while this is a welcome departure from the practices of the past, it will be a long time before development agents and public officials in the field, who as noted above have a strong paternalist attitude to the peasant, will consciously accept participatory program management and adopt the approach as part of their regular working methods. In this regard, NGOs working in the rural areas have a relatively better record though here too the participatory approach employed leaves a lot to be desired. Another departure from past policy is the emphasis given to smallholder agriculture. The Federal government's rural-centered and agricultural-led development strategy gives a central role to peasant agriculture, which is taken to be the engine of economic growth. While this has aroused considerable controversy, it does show that the government has made a conscious decision to wager on the peasant. In contrast, the imperial and Derg regimes placed high hopes on large-scale mechanized agriculture (mostly private in the case of the former, state and co-operative in the case of the latter), which they both saw as the motive force of agricultural growth. Indeed, Derg policy was decidedly hostile to individual peasant enterprise, labelling it as backward and an obstacle to the construction of socialism.

The third major characteristic of the development narrative is that it has had a strong authoritarian strain. The decision-making process in all three regimes has been undemocratic, with the power to initiate and shape policy concentrated in a few hands at the top. Frequently, development policy was prepared by a small coterie of experts close to the head of state, discussed (sometimes in secret) in the inner circles of government before being presented to the relevant legislative body for formal approval. Even when, as during the imperial period, the initial policy draft was prepared by the line Ministries, it was often substantially revised when it passed through the offices of the emperor before submission to Parliament. The Derg's decision-making apparatus was modelled on those of Soviet bloc countries: major policies were prepared by close advisors of Colonel Mengistu and presented to the Central Committee for approval. The present government has kept the same tradition though under different context: policy-making is still by

and large done at the Prime Minister's office and later submitted to Parliament for routine approval. Public consultation, or seeking stakeholder and professional opinion has been alien to the decision-making tradition of the country.

Haile Selassie's Parliament, which was mostly made up of the landed classes, was a weak institution with little power to question policy initiatives except, as we saw earlier, when these were seen to be threatening the economic interests of the powerful members in it. Each time the emperor presented the Five Year Plan to Parliament with a "speech from the throne" he was rapturously applauded by the MPs gathered from both Houses for the occasion. In most cases, important decisions had to pass through the emperor's desk and quite frequently took an inordinate time to reach Parliament, but when they did actually reach there they were invariably thoroughly watered down. At present there is less pomp and ceremony, and decisions travel relatively rapidly for approval but otherwise the practice has not changed significantly. Since the ruling party holds an overwhelming majority of the seats in the current Parliament, most decisions are approved without even the appearance of a debate. On the other hand, criticisms of government initiatives are regularly voiced by opposition MPs who, however, are not strong enough to influence the final decision or the content of the initiatives presented. In contrast, the Derg practically did away with Parliament altogether: the "elected" National *Shengo* was only a platform for the lengthy speeches by Colonel Mengistu, the "supreme" leader. The *Shengo* was subordinate to the party, which in turn was subordinate to Mengistu and his advisors.

Moreover, none of the governments had institutionalized a policy review process allowing for timely corrections; policy review was considered a challenge to the power and wisdom of the responsible authorities. During the imperial regime, questioning policy decisions approved by the emperor was considered sacrilegious, while the Derg considered any form of dissent as counter-revolutionary. Neither the imperial regime nor the Derg allowed any political parties or civic organizations to be formed. The political system under the Derg

run along Soviet lines with authority vested in a single Leninist party. Until the reforms introduced by the present government in the early 1990s, the media was a slavish mouthpiece of the government of the day. There is considerable change in this regard at present. The present government has instituted reforms that deregulated the print media, allowed the active engagement of civil society organizations, and permitted multi-party elections, none of which would have been possible under the two previous regimes. The press law of 1992 had a dramatic impact on the country's media which until then was entirely state owned. There was a proliferation of private newspapers and news magazines, and while the quality of the papers leaves a great deal to be desired, and a good many of them proved to be irresponsible and unprofessional, they have shown that the press can play a vital role in giving voice to a wide variety of views which previously had been suppressed. There is considerable criticism of government policy by the three new institutions that have emerged since the fall of the Derg, namely the private press, civil society organizations and opposition parties, however, this has not had any discernable impact on the policy making process which continues to be top-down and unresponsive.

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Conclusion: New Agrarian Debate

An agrarian society like Ethiopia cannot hope to achieve sustainable development without a vigorous rural economy. While, under present circumstances, Ethiopian agriculture cannot be expected to be the engine of such development, a significant contribution from it is essential to attain this goal. The historical evidence suggests that the invigoration of the rural economy has come through the commercialization of agriculture and the growth of urbanization, in both cases accompanied by significant changes in class roles or class formations. Barrington Moore has argued that both processes will bring hardship to the peasantry causing a deterioration of its livelihood and income that sometimes has led to rural uprisings. Moore's central thesis is that agricultural commercialization has historically been a decisive factor in agrarian transformation; it was spearheaded by the landed classes and involved the dispossession of the peasantry and its transformation into wage labourers (1966: Ch.7). The decay and collapse of imperial China, he argues, was due to its failure to adopt commercial agriculture. He has also shown that where the agrarian transition has been successful it has been accompanied by the dissolution of the peasantry, and such dissolution has also been historically necessary, he thinks, for democratic progress; commercialization by a landed elite holding down a subordinate peasantry on the land could lead towards fascism. By and large, he maintains, "the elimination of the peasant question through the transformation of the peasantry into some other kind of social formation appears to augur best for democracy" (: 432). Barrington Moore does not have much to say about urbanization and its role in agrarian transformation, which is curious considering the emphasis he has placed on commercial farming. Commercialization would be partial and inconclusive without a growing urban population and a vigorous urban-based economy. He does acknowledge, however, that historically the active struggle of the urban classes (the bourgeois and

the labourer, in particular) was an indispensable factor in the growth of parliamentary democracy.

As I have tried to argue in the preceding essays, the condition of the Ethiopian peasantry has been deteriorating for quite some time and most peasants today are on the margin of physical existence. This was not caused by widespread commercialization and urbanization, nor were peasant dispossessions extensive enough to be a significant cause of rural misfortune. On the contrary, I have suggested that an important contributing factor for the stagnation of the rural economy and social formation has been state hegemony and peasant subordination. State hegemony has inhibited the possibility of a dynamic impulse from emerging and the seeds of change from taking root.

The significance of commercialization and urbanization for agrarian change in this country cannot be overemphasized. Commercialization of agriculture here means not just trade in grain and other goods but, more importantly, the shift of production away from subsistence towards the market. Obviously, the major obstacle to progress in this respect may appear to be the lack of improved farm technology but I believe the immense population pressure on the land and the fragmentation and deterioration of holdings is also an inhibiting factor. New technology will not be attractive to the enterprising peasant under these conditions. Moreover, commercialization has not made much progress because of the class factor- i.e. the farmer producing predominantly for the market made his appearance briefly only on one occasion and has yet to surface again, though it must be said that recent initiatives to open up the "land market" may provide the needed stimulus. Other factors include the insufficiency of the marketed surplus, inadequate urbanization, insufficient transport infrastructure and financial services, and a hostile policy environment. Similarly, urbanization has played only a limited role due to the small size of the urban population (with 15 percent urbanization Ethiopia is the least urbanized country in Africa), its slow rate of growth, and insufficient investment and employment opportunities in the country's towns and cities.

Commercialization and urbanization are dependent on each other: without vigorous growth in urbanization (both demographically and economically) commercialization will be stalled. The present government's recent endorsement of commercialization as one plank of its rural development strategy assumes that the process will not have any significant demographic impact and that the rural-urban population distribution will remain largely the same. But this assumption is based on a poor grasp of the rural reality. At the moment, the countryside is facing the threat of a Malthusian disaster due to the following reasons: a) it is carrying an immense population which is growing at more than three percent per year; b) this population is immobile since there is only limited temporary or permanent out migration; c) there is very limited land available for farming hence per capita holdings are getting smaller, and per capita food production has been declining for many years; and d) there is virtually no employment opportunities in the countryside outside agriculture except for petty trading. Under these conditions, it would be foolish to expect sustained improvements in agricultural production. A healthy growth in commercialization will involve not only more food available for the urban areas but also the transfer of large numbers of peasants from the land to other employment schemes because improvements in labour and land productivity will require fewer hands on the farm. It is evident therefore that some of this excess population has to be absorbed in the urban areas, however, the cities, and in particular the secondary towns with which the rural economy has greater links, are stagnating at the moment and without a concerted effort to invigorate them more rural migration will only push them deeper into stagnation.

Before closing this discussion I would like to offer a number of broad observations suggesting not so much a blueprint for a new strategy for change as issues for an alternative agrarian discourse. The bases for these observations are to be found in the analysis presented in the preceding essays in this work.

First, I believe agrarian transformation in this country

will not occur through the agency of the hegemonic state. Indeed, as has been shown in many parts of this work, the strong hand of the state has distorted the rules, misplaced the priorities and misconstrued the agrarian discourse. The legacy of half a century of state directed rural development has been in large measure grinding poverty, famine and pandemics. Under favourable circumstances, the best the state can do is prepare the ground and create the conducive institutional environment for change to take place through the initiative of enterprising social elements and the labouring people themselves.

Secondly, the class factor is a critical factor in agrarian transitions. The historical evidence shows that it was a distinct social element, or a particular class that first takes up a new form of production, or tries out new innovations or invests in new opportunities. Why some groups are more open to new ventures or more willing to take more risks at a given time than others is a question that will not concern us here, but the fact remains that it is often a particular group that first seizes the available opportunities to set in train a process of change and adaptation. A diverse social landscape and competing classes is an indispensable condition. Class homogeneity of the kind that we now have in the rural areas can only lead to stagnation.

Barrington Moore shows that historically it was the landed classes (or elements within them) that first turned to commercial agriculture and thus provided the dynamic impulse for agrarian transformation. But since then there have been other models and other routes to change. The commercial farmer may be the urban investor with or without strong links to the landed classes, or enterprising peasants who manage to seize the available opportunities to turn themselves into dynamic farmers operating small-scale farm enterprises without mechanization. As we have seen earlier, this was the experience in this country in the late 1960s and early 70s before the Revolution changed the rules and redefined the agrarian discourse. I have argued that rural class differentiation is a positive thing, and that agrarian transformation spearheaded by the peasant-turned-commercial farmer (the yeoman, or kulak if you will)

presents a much better option than any other. I believe such a farmer will not be driven by the brutal ethos of naked capitalism but will instead engage in a form of enterprise combining capitalist and associative elements such as co-operatives, peer-based credit services, group-based investment ventures, and environmental-friendly management practices. I should note that this option does not exclude agricultural mechanization and large-scale farm operations. If eventually the dissolution of the peasantry is to occur, it will occur through the internal evolution of that class and the emergence of different social forces within it. I do not believe that in this country the "elimination of the peasant question" will be achieved through forceful methods like those attempted during the enclosure movement in England, or through the instrumentality of the state using a different form of forceful method such as in the Great Leap Forward in China at the end of the 1950s. Given a sound policy environment, rural differentiation will take its own natural course but it may also be accelerated if there is a rapid process of urban growth.

My third observation is closely linked to the question of class and has to do with the issue of human agency discussed earlier, namely that human agency is an indispensable factor in accelerating change and invigorating the economy. As we have seen already, the agrarian systems we have dealt with stifled, in one way or another, the agency of the rural producer with dire consequences of which some have been discussed at length in the preceding pages. A fundamental rethink of this issue, which I believe is overdue, will have wider implications in terms of political institutions, power relations, attitudinal and management approaches. The first important issue that should be addressed seriously in this regard is the dominant-subordinate relationship between state and peasantry and its transformation into a relationship based on partnership. The basis for this is local level democracy that is now woefully lacking. The democratic approach at the farm level in turn should guide the dissemination of new ideas and practices on the part of state agents: dialogue, consultation and respect for local knowledge should be the operating principles. A second issue

relates to the question of how to promote and reward peasant entrepreneurship. Government policy has for long reflected a bias against peasant enterprise - more so during the Derg than at present. There have not been many support schemes aimed at encouraging rural entrepreneurs; peasants willing to take the risk to try new technologies, or to shift to new enterprises are not covered by a reward mechanism or encouraged by improved financial services. In contrast, the urban capitalist willing to invest in farming or agro-processing is rewarded with a variety of incentives and other benefits.

My fourth observation is that the catalyst for agrarian transformation must be sought not only in the dynamic forces in the rural sector but also in the growth and ascendancy of the urban sector. The arguments supporting this proposition have been presented elsewhere in this volume and thus should not detain us here, suffice to say that the cities have an indispensable role because at bottom development is *the conquest of rurality*. It is difficult to conceive of a successful agrarian transition that is not accompanied by significant changes in the spatial distribution of the population and in forms of livelihood.

I have argued above that for the last half century or so the dominant development discourse has been donor driven, statist and technocratic. Agrarian change is not merely the transfer of new skills and technologies but involves changes in power relations, class formations, institutions and values. The discourse has, among other things, served to reinforce state hegemony, and inhibit the democratization of the decision-making process. It is a discourse grounded on the dependency of the state on external powers and on borrowed ideas. On the other hand, suppressed and ignored for long, the internal voice has been muted and often undistinguished, thus making it difficult for an alternative, home-grown discourse to rise to the challenge. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to note that the climate for such discourse is more conducive now than at any time before.

It would be rash to try to define the contents of the home-grown discourse here but it may be useful to suggest how it should differ from the dominant discourse. The alternative must be firmly based on a holistic self-examination, clearly

reflecting our concrete reality, experience and limitations. Such analysis must enable us to define our own priorities and long-term goals, and to monitor our own progress. Constructive criticism from others with differing viewpoints, including the donor community, will be healthy and should be welcomed. The analysis must be pluralistic: it must place the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalized at the forefront but at the same time should also identify, recognize and encourage emergent forces. It should not be seduced by the apparent finery of the donor-driven discourse since as we have seen earlier such discourse is based on a global formula and subject to sudden shifts and permutations. The new agrarian discourse must not however be ignorant of advances being made in the international arena in the fields of knowledge pertinent to its needs, nor fail to take into account the dynamics of the international economic system and the global structure of power and influence. But above all, the discourse should voice the centrality of democratic participation by all stakeholders in the development enterprise.

Finally, the debate on agrarian change will, I believe, be more fruitful and more relevant to our condition if it is pursued in the framework of what I call agrarian pluralism. This approach starts from the common maxim that it will not be wise to put all one's eggs in one basket. Pluralism means encouraging many players and diverse forms of economic and social enterprise to make their contribution. Diversity will promote innovative endeavour and will facilitate the dissemination of new ideas and techniques in society at minimal cost. Agrarian pluralism assumes that the dynamic interaction between small and large enterprises, cooperative and capitalist forms of production, state and private initiatives, and similar forms of engagement are not only good but must be actively encouraged.

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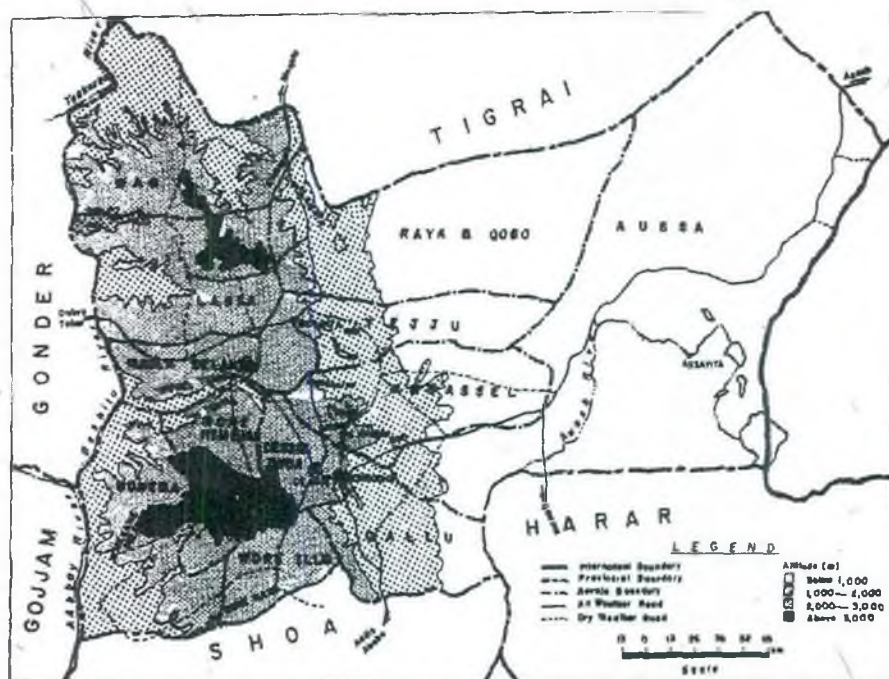
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Maps

1 Ethiopia: Administrative Divisions (circa 1974)

MAP 1: ETHIOPIA: ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS (Circa 1974)





Map 3. Walo: Zones and Administrative Division

This volume brings together a number of studies on rural Ethiopia written by the author in recent years and offered as a contribution to the emerging debate on agrarian change in the country. The broad time frame for the work is the last half-century of modern Ethiopia, from the 1950s to the beginning of the 2000s, a period which coincides politically with the country's three regimes, namely the imperial regime of Haile Selassie, which was replaced by a military-Stalinist junta known as the Derg, and the present regime which came to power after overthrowing the latter. Over this half century much has changed in the country but much also remains the same. Similarly, while the three political regimes differ radically in a number of significant respects, they also have many things in common, particularly in their relations to the peasantry, their quest for a strong presence in the countryside, and, in some respects, in their approach to development management.



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